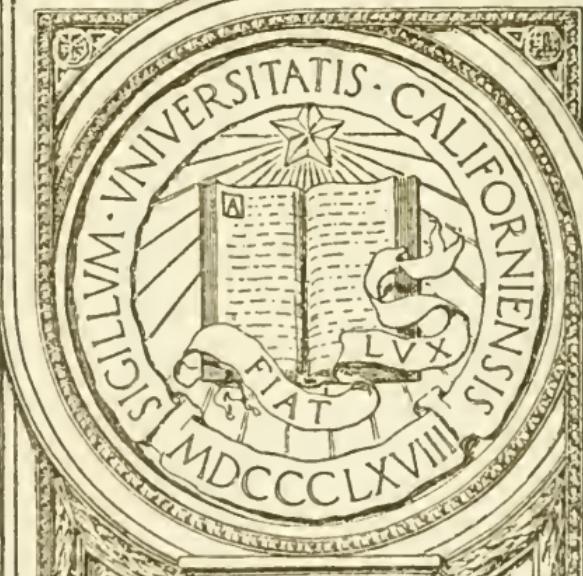


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THE
CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN.
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VOL. II.



THE  
CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN;  
ITS LORDS  
*Spiritual and Temporal;*  
ITS INHABITANTS  
*Earthly and Unearthly.*

BY  
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AUTHOR OF  
"HEIDELBERG;" "THE STEP-MOTHER;" "THE SMUGGLER;"  
ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# EHRENSTEIN.

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## CHAPTER I.

WE are all well aware that there are certain of man's infirmities which may be turned to serve his own purposes when the exercise of his faculties might be dangerous or inconvenient. It may sometimes be pleasant to have no eyes, sometimes to have no ears ; and we have known instances where it was believed judicious in certain parties to have no legs, till they were found for them by other parties interested in the progress of the recusants. Now the lords of Eppenfeld occasionally judged it expedient to be extremely hard of hearing ; and in order to favour this infirmity

as far as possible, no bell was attached to their gates, though these tinkling instruments had long before been introduced into common use, as the means of summoning porters or warders to answer the inquiries of the stranger, or to open the doors to the visitor. It would seem that they were fond of the usages of antiquity, for the only means provided for making oneself heard before their castle, was the long disused one of a large horn, suspended under the arch of an outwork in advance of the drawbridge, the sound of which might be heard or not by those within, as they liked.

The Baron of Eppenfeld was seated at table on the evening of the day of which we have just been speaking, though the hour of dinner was long past, and that of supper not yet arrived. Human nature, however, is the same in all ages. We may smooth, and shape, and polish, and gild the stone, but the material remains unchanged, and the same propensities and habits become apparent whenever circumstances call them into action. Lightly won,

and lightly spent, was as true a maxim in those days as in our own; and the predatory noble, or robber knight, was as sure to wind up any successful expedition with revelry and drunkenness, as the wrecker, the smuggler, or the footpad of modern times. The Baron of Eppenfeld had made a glorious sweep of the goods of the Venetian merchants; he had obtained more gold by an enterprise of little difficulty or danger, than had ever warmed his coffers before; and, consequently, the choice vintages of his cellars—though I cannot say they were the produce of his own vineyards—were doomed to flow for himself and his soldiery, in honour of the happy event. He was revelling then with the wine cup in his hand, when the sound of the horn before the gates made itself heard in the hall. He and his companions had drunk for many an hour, and the eyes of several of the worthy gentlemen present were growing somewhat glassy and unmeaning. The Baron's own head, however, seemed made of the same cast-iron materials

as his frame, and the quantity was infinite which he could absorb without any apparent effect.

“ Ha !” he cried, as soon as the sound met his ear; “ go and look through the loophole, Stephen, and see who that is blowing the horn.”

The man to whom he spoke, rose, and carried his flushed countenance and watery eyes to a loophole in the neighbouring tower, and after an absence of about two minutes, returned to say, in not very distinct tones,—“ It is a youth, on horseback.”

“ That young villain !—come for his share, I dare say,” said the Baron “ Well, we’ll give him his share, and take it from him afterwards. He has helped us to skin his lord, and so it is all fair for us to skin him.”

A peal of laughter from his followers succeeded to this remarkably just and honourable observation of the Baron of Eppenfeld, in the midst of which the man Stephen grumbled forth, two or three times before he could make

himself heard—“This is not he, my lord. This fellow’s taller by a hand’s breadth, and he has got a number of knechts after him; so you had better look to yourself. I could not count them, for they wavered about before my eyes as if they were dancing.”

“That was because you are drunk, swine!” replied the Baron. “Knechts!—what brings he knechts here for? Go you out, Fritz, and look at them through the grate, and see how many there are, and what they seek, if you can divine by any token, without speaking to them. Don’t let yourself be seen before you come and tell me. Heaven send it may be a party of rich pilgrims come to seek shelter at Eppenfeld! We will treat them hospitably, and send them lightly on their way.”

“If they’re pilgrims, they’re pilgrims in steel coats,” answered Stephen; while the man whom his lord called Fritz, hurried off to take a better survey.

These tidings did not seem to please his lord, for the Baron’s brow knit, and after looking

two or three times towards the door of the hall, he was in the act of rising to go out, when his second messenger returned, saying with a laugh, “It’s Ferdinand of Altenburg, whom you have seen with the Count of Ehrenstein; and with him he’s got ten men of the castle.”

“Are you sure of the youth?” demanded the Baron. “We must have no mistakes, though we can manage ten men well enough; ay, or forty, if they send them.”

“Oh, I am quite sure,” answered Fritz; “for he has got his beaver up, and I can see his face as well as I can see yours.”

“What can the Count want?” murmured Eppenfeld to himself. “Well, we are good friends enough, and he is not very particular as to what he does himself, so let them in, and bring the youth straight hither.—Take away these cups and tankards, and make the place look orderly. Then let every drunken man lie to his own sty, for if the good Count wants help with the strong hand, we may perchance have to mount before nightfall.”

With a good deal of serambling and confusion, the board was cleared, and laid edgeways at the side of the hall, the tressels, the cups, the flagons, and all the other implements which they had employed in the revel were hastily removed, and after the horn at the gates had been sounded loudly once or twice, Fritz, and two or three of the more sober of the soldiery, went out to give admission to the followers of the lord of Ehrenstein.

In the mean while the Baron walked up and down the hall, considering gravely the question of what the Count of Ehrenstein could want with him—for those were days when men were so much accustomed to plunder and wrong each other, that suspicion mingled with almost every transaction of life, and neither rogues nor honest men ever trusted each other without a doubt. Before his cogitations came to an end, Ferdinand—having left the horses, and several of his followers to take care of them, in the outer court—was ushered into the hall, with five stout men at his back; and

advanced at once towards the Baron, through the different groups of somewhat wild and fierce looking retainers, who formed the favourite household of the good lord of Eppenfeld.

“ Well, good youth, what do you want with me ? ” asked the Baron. “ If I am not much mistaken, you are young Ferdinand of Altenburg, who was page some years since to my fair cousin the Count of Ehrenstein.—Whom do you follow now ? ”

“ The same, my lord,” replied Ferdinand, “ and the Count has sent me to you with his friendly greeting ; bidding me say, that he learns from the complaint of certain Venetian merchants, that some of your people, not knowing that they were journeying to the Castle of Ehrenstein, or that the treasure they carried was his, have stopped and plundered them on the highway from Zweibrucken. He bids me now tell you, however, that such is the case, and requires not only that the whole shall be instantly restored, but that compensa-

tion shall be made for the injury which your people have inflicted upon these merchants and their followers."

Here the Baron of Eppenfeld interrupted him by a loud laugh, "On my life," he cried, "thou art a bold youth to bring me such a message!"

"That message is not yet done, my lord," answered Ferdinand, coolly. "The Count bade me add, that the compensation to the merchants is to be awarded by himself and Count Frederick of Leiningen, now sojourning with him at Ehrenstein, and commanded me to require an answer at your hands without delay, that he may take measures accordingly."

The Baron gazed at him, as if in surprise at his audacity; but yet at the mention of the name of Count Frederick of Leiningen as a guest in the Castle of Ehrenstein, a shade of doubt seemed to come over his face; and when the youth had done, he turned abruptly from him, and paced up and down the hall for a minute. Then, stopping again as suddenly,

he replied, “If I say bluntly, No, what have you to answer then ?”

“ My task then would be,” answered Ferdinand, “ to defy you in the name of my good lord and of Count Frederick, and to tell you that they will be before your gates in arms ere four-and-twenty hours are over.”

The Baron bit his lip. “ Tell them that Eppenfeld is high,” he answered ; “ tell them that its lord wears a sword that has made braver men than they are skip—tell them—yet stay, I will consider this, and consult with my people. You shall lodge here to-night and sup with me, and perhaps ere to-morrow I shall consider my old friendship with your lord rather than my anger at his rash message.”

“ I fear that cannot be, my lord,” answered Ferdinand ; “ I am neither to eat, to drink, to sleep, or spare the spur for more than half an hour, till I bear back your answer.”

“ By my faith ! then, no other shall you have,” cried the Baron, vehemently ; “ and

if you seek more, you shall have it in a dungeon of the castle.—Ay, tell the Count what I have said; and you may add that he had better mind his own affairs, and meddle not with my booty, or he may find that I will not only have revenge in arms, but other retribution which will fall heavier still: tell him I know things which, though he thinks they have been buried deep for well nigh twenty years, may yet pull him down from where he stands, and give him to the emperor's headsman. So much for the Count of Ehrenstein.”

“And what for Count Frederick of Leiningen,” asked Ferdinand, not at all daunted by the fierce looks and tones of the Baron. “I was equally charged by him to defy you.”

“Good faith! your impudence well nigh makes me laugh,” exclaimed the Baron. “What for Count Frederick of Leiningen? Why, tell His Highness that I thank him gratefully for the good prize he put into my hands, and that he shall have the share

stipulated by his lad, Martin of Dillberg. You may say, moreover, that I was very cautious," the Baron continued, with a bitter sneer, "and attended to all the warnings given me. I never meddled with the men till they were on my own land, without a pass from me. If they will do such things, they must bear the consequences. I have taken my toll of them, and I shall keep it, if all the counts in the empire said me Nay. So now begone, and remember that you tell both my loving cousins in each other's presence, what I have said in answer to their messages."

Ferdinand of Altenburg made no reply, but took a step back towards the door, very doubtful, to say the truth, whether he would be permitted to reach it. He was suffered to pass uninterrupted, however; but the moment he had quitted the hall, the man Fritz, who acted as the Baron's lieutenant, sprang to his lord's side, and murmured eagerly some words of advice. Those who were around did not hear all that he said,

but some broken parts of sentences were audible, such as, "Let us have four-and-twenty hours at least—never stand a strict leaguer so badly provided—bring the beeves from the wood, and call in all the men.—We can do it in a minute—here are only ten with him."

The Baron nodded his head, and made a sign with his hand; and Fritz, beckoning to the rest of the men to follow, hurried out into the court-yard.

Ferdinand of Altenburg had one foot in the stirrup, when the Baron's lieutenant approached him; and the rest of the men of Ehrenstein were scattered about—some mounting their horses, others mounted. The gate was open and the drawbridge down, and not more than fourteen or fifteen of the soldiers of Eppenfeld were in the court when Fritz entered it. Proceeding cautiously, therefore, he touched Ferdinand's arm lightly, saying, "My good lord would fain speak with you for a moment farther, young sir."

“I must not stay any longer,” answered Ferdinand, and was in the act of springing into the saddle, when Fritz, seeing a number of others following from the hall, threw himself suddenly upon him, and endeavoured to pinion his arms. Ferdinand was younger and more active, though perhaps not so strong; and with a blow of his gauntlet struck the man down, freeing himself from his grasp. A scene of struggling confusion succeeded, in the course of which the young man and all his followers but two were overpowered by the superior numbers of their opponents, and carried back as captives into the castle. The other two were men who had already mounted, and who, at the first sign of this unequal strife pushed their horses towards the gates, dashed over the drawbridge, and took their way at full speed down the valley.

In the mean time, Ferdinand of Altenburg was dragged back into the castle, but instead of being taken to the hall, was hurried along the passages, and down a narrow flight of steps, to

a small room or cell, which perhaps did not exactly deserve the name of a dungeon, for it was actually above the ground, but which was dim, damp, and inconvenient enough. In those days, however, the things which we are accustomed to look upon as absolute necessities, were merely luxuries, and people of very high station fared hard and lay harder; so that a pallet bed, a narrow chamber, a little light, and a stone floor, were hardships not aggravated to the mind of Ferdinand by a contrast with any great delicacy of nurture.

He did not remonstrate with those who bore him along, for he was well aware that by so doing, he would only waste his breath; and indeed he said nothing, for threats he knew could only aggravate the rigours of his imprisonment, and he looked upon patience as a sovereign balm for all such misfortunes as those to which he was now subjected. Neither did he resist at all, from the moment it became evident that resistance would be in vain; and thus, though he was dragged along at first with

some degree of violence, the men who held him soon slackened their speed, and relaxed their grasp. When they had pushed him into the cell, they stood leaning against the lintels of the door, gazing at him for a moment before they shut it; and the man Fritz, whose right cheek and eye displayed very remarkable evidence of the strength with which Ferdinand had struck him, seemed now not a little surprised at the calmness and good-humour with which the young gentleman bore his fate.

“Well you take it vastly quietly, Master Ferdinand of Altenburg,” said the man; “you seem as if you rather liked it than otherwise.”

“Oh, no,” answered Ferdinand, laughing; “I don’t like it; but, as I expected it from the very first, I am not taken by surprise. There would be no benefit either, my good friend, in my struggling with you after struggling is useless, or in railing at you when railing would have no effect, and, therefore, all I have to say on the subject is, that there can be little

good in keeping me here, since some of the men have got off, for I saw them with my own eyes. They will carry the news just as well as I could, and before this time to-morrow you will have the two Counts under Eppenfeld."

"That's all very good," answered Fritz; "but I shall keep you here, notwithstanding."

"I hope not on account of the blow I gave you," said Ferdinand; "no good soldier ever resents a fair blow received in strife."

"No, no," replied the other; "if you knocked me down, I tripped you up, so that's all equal; but I have two good reasons for keeping you:—first, my good lord having more wine than wit in his head, I am thinking, sent messages to the two Counts which could do no good, and might do much harm; and secondly, you'll be a sort of hostage, young man. I know the Count loves you well, and would not like to see you dangling from the battlements, like a pear from the end of a branch."

"He would not much care, I fancy," answered Ferdinand, indifferently. "But in the

mean time, I should like to have some supper, for if a man is to be hanged to-morrow, that is no reason why he should not eat and drink to-day."

"Well, supper you shall have, and good wine to boot," answered Fritz. "You seem to bear a light heart, and ought not to want wherewithal to keep it up.—It is lucky that hanging is soon over, and can't happen twice, so good-night and God speed ye!"

With this peculiar topic of consolation the man left him to comfort himself as best he might, and closing the door behind him, swung up a ponderous wooden bar, and pushed the bolts into the staples.

## CHAPTER II.

THE day had been bright and cheerful, but towards nightfall the sky had become obscured by thin, light vapours. Low, sweeping clouds, or rather masses of drifting mist, were hurried along through the air, and brushing the hills, and sometimes floating down into the valleys—like the skirt of the wind's gray robe—now hid the grander features of the scene, now suffered the crags and pinnacles to peep out clear and distinct, as on they hastened with all the speed and importance of great affairs. As the sun set, indeed, a purple glow diffused itself amongst those vapors, but they did not clear away; and speedily after a fine rain began to fall, somewhat cold and chilly, hiding everything around in dull opaque mist. In fact, one of those frequent

alternations to which all mountain countries are more or less subject, had come over the weather, rendering the evening as cheerless and dismal as the morning had been bright and gay.

Nevertheless, two horsemen still rode on their way about half-past eight o'clock, though their beasts were evidently jaded, and their own garments and arms were covered with the dust of many a weary mile of road; but about five or six miles beyond the small town of Annweiler, one of the horses cast a shoe, and the beast speedily began to show symptoms of lameness. The rider was consequently obliged to dismount, and lead his weary steed; and the other drew in his bridle, in order not to outride his companion—for the state of society, of which we have given some glimpses, rendered the presence of a companion on the road a very desirable circumstance to the wayfarer.

“We can’t be far from the smith’s forge,” said the dismounted man to his friend. “I will stop and get him shod there.”

“ Will he shoe him ? ” asked the other. “ He is no friend of our good lord, and has not shod a hoof for him for years.”

“ Oh, Franz Creussen is a good heart,” answered the man on foot. “ He would shoe the devil sooner than a poor beast should go lame. Besides, he will like to hear our tidings, though they will vex him mightily; for the young gentleman is a great friend of his. By the Lord ! I should not wonder if that mad Baron of Eppenfeld put him to death—there’s no knowing what he will do.”

“ No, no,” answered the other; “ he knows better. The Count would make him pay dearly for it.”

“ I’m not sure of that,” replied the man on foot. “ I’ve seen him give Ferdinand of Altenburg many a moody look at times; and I’ve a notion in my head—but no matter for that, I shall keep it to myself. I think some people in the castle love the young gentleman better than our lord likes.”

“ Not unlikely,” said the man on horseback.

“I’ve my thoughts too, but the less said the better.”

The conversation now dropped between the two weary men, and for about half an hour or so they continued to plod on their way in silence, till at length a red glare, suddenly rising and falling through the dark and misty air, showed them that they were approaching the forge of Franz Creussen, and that the industrious smith, or some of his busy men, were still pursuing the labours of the day. The wide open shed, when they came near, displayed ten or twelve Cyclops, naked nearly to the waist, plying the busy hammer at different anvils, blowing the huge bellows, or heating the iron in the fire. But Franz Creussen himself was not amongst them; and while one of the travellers applied to have his horse shod as speedily as possible, the other inquired for the master of the forge, and was informed that he had gone into his cottage hard by, to take his evening meal. Fastening his horse by a hook, the horseman proceeded to

seek Franz in his house; and as the smith was a wealthy man in his way of life, offering very cogent reasons for refusing to submit to many of the exactions which the neighbouring nobles generally laid upon the peasantry, his dwelling presented an appearance of comfort, and even luxury, seldom met with amongst persons in his station.

“Who the fiend are you?” exclaimed the giant, as soon as the soldier entered. “I have seen your face somewhere, but do not know your name. Ah! now I bethink me; you are one of those who were riding with the lad Ferdinand this morning, are you not? Where is he?—but I can guess.”

“He’s in a dungeon at Eppenfeld by this time,” answered the man. “I and my companion are the only two that got off; so, as I know you have a friendship for him, Franz, I thought I would come in and tell you, while my comrade got his horse’s shoe put on.”

“That was kind, that was kind,” cried Franz Creussen, rubbing one of his temples with a

forefinger as big as a child's arm. "There, take some wine; the boy must be got out."

"Oh, the Count will get him out," answered the soldier; adding, "that's to say, if they don't put him to death first."

"If they do, let them have good heed to their brains," said Franz Creussen; "for the Baron of Eppenfeld's skull would make a poor anvil, and yet it shall be tapped by my hammer, if he has injured the lad in life or limb. It's time that the Baron were out of the world, as well as some others;" and Franz Creussen fell into thought, and rubbed his temple again.

The man, in the mean while, helped himself liberally to the wine which the smith offered, and in a minute or two after, the master of the forge raised himself suddenly, saying, "The horse must be shod by this time, and you must on to Ehrenstein with all speed, to bear these tidings to the lords there, for they must not let the youth lie long in Eppenfeld."

"Oh, the Count will see right done, and that quickly," answered his companion.

“If the one Count doesn’t, the other will,” replied Franz Creussen; “but you speed on, and let them have the intelligence at all events;” and striding into his forge, he reproved his men somewhat sharply for having taken so long to put a shoe on a horse; and having seen the work accomplished, and bid the two soldiers adieu, he turned to his own workmen, saying, “Shut up, shut up, and put out the fires. I have other work in hand for us all.”

In the mean while the two soldiers of Ehrenstein rode on their way homeward, forcing their horses to as quick a pace as fatigue would permit. When they reached the castle the hour was late, but the Count was still playing at tables with his guest, and they were instantly admitted to his presence. They found both the noblemen in a gay mood, laughing over their game; while Adelaide sat at a little distance on one side, with Martin of Dillberg standing by her chair, and the jester, seated on a stool, amusing her by his quaint remarks.

“Well, what tidings, what tidings?” ex-

claimed the Count of Ehrenstein. “Where is Ferdinand? Is he not come back?”

The man’s answer, on the present occasion, was much the same as that which he had made to Franz Creussen; and when it was uttered, the Count of Ehrenstein struck the table vehemently, exclaiming, “This is too bad. By Heaven it shall be avenged!”

Count Frederick’s eye glanced suddenly to the countenance of the fair girl who sat near, which had become deadly pale; and then, turning to the soldier, he inquired, “Did you hear the young gentleman deliver his message?”

“No, my good lord,” replied the man who had before spoken, “I was left with the horses, but Herman here did.”

“What said the Baron?” asked Count Frederick, turning to the other, who was now coming forward. “Tell us all that took place.”

Herman, however, was a slower and more cautious man than his companion, and he was by no means inclined to repeat expressions which he had heard distinctly enough, but

which he feared might give offence to the two noblemen before whom he stood, judging rightly, that a part of the anger excited by insulting messages always attaches to the person who bears them. He replied, therefore, circumspectly, “The Baron seemed to be in a great fury, noble sir; and indeed, I thought had been drinking too much. I can’t recollect all that he said, but I know he sent Ferdinand of Altenburg back with a flat refusal. Then the young gentleman defied him boldly in both your names, and warned him that you would be under his hold before four-and-twenty hours were over. That seemed to enrage him still more, and thinking we might not get off quite safely, I mounted my horse as soon as we were in the court. Master Ferdinand had his foot in the stirrup to do so likewise, when they came running out of the hall, and laid hold of him. He struck the first man down, but there were so many that it was impossible to contend with them; and seeing the greater number of our people taken, and our leader held down by

three men with their knives at his throat, I thought it best to gallop off while the draw-bridge was down, that you might know what had happened as soon as possible."

Count Frederick looked again towards Ade-lade, and then to her father, saying, "This must be avenged, indeed, Ehrenstein. Both for our honour's sake, and for this noble youth's deliverance, we must take speedy steps."

"I will march at daybreak," answered the Count of Ehrenstein; "and with your good aid, doubt not to bring this freebooter to reason very speedily."

"By my faith! I will march to-night," cried Count Frederick. "Daybreak, I trust, will find me beneath his walls. Frederick of Lein-ingen sleeps not after he is insulted, till he has had vengeance. If it will take you long time to prepare, you can follow to-morrow;—for my part, I will give this man no time to strengthen himself against us. Martin, hie ye down, and bid the men feed their horses, make ready their arms, and take with them sufficient for a three

days' stay in the field. I will not lodge under aught but the blue sky or the green bough, till I have righted this wrong."

"I will with you, noble friend," said the Count of Ehrenstein. "In two or three hours I can be ready. Ho! Sickendorf, Mosbach! to the saddle, good knights, leave your draughts and prepare for Eppenfeld."

"You must leave men enough to guard your castle, Ehrenstein," said Count Frederick, "and some one to command in it."

"I will command, uncle," said the jester, coming forward, "that's my place by right of birth."

Count Frederick smiled, but paused a moment, and then asked "How do you prove that, Herr Narren?"

"Why, I am the eldest son of the family," answered the jester, "the eldest branch of the whole house."

"Indeed," cried the Lord of Ehrenstein, "show us your quarterings, mein Herr, with which of my ancestors does your tribe begin?"

“With Adam,” answered the jester.

“But the eldest branch, the eldest branch—how are you of the eldest branch?” asked Count Frederick, “by the father’s or the mother’s side?”

“By the male,” said the jester. “Was not Adam a fool when he ate the apple, because his wife asked him? Was not Cain a fool when he killed Abel, and thought that nobody saw him? So you see we of the cloth are evidently of the elder branch, and take the inheritance, and therefore I’ve a right to command in the castle.”

“Nay, nay, Herr Narren,” said the Lord of Ehrenstein. “I must leave one of my own men to command under you.”

“Cannot I fill that task, noble Count?” asked Martin of Dillberg, who had just returned to the hall. “If I remain behind, I shall be right glad to be of any service.”

“If you remain behind!” exclaimed Count Frederick; “why should you do so, Martin? You are not one to shirk honour, or to fly from danger, I hope—why should you not go with the rest?”

“I do not know, my lord,” replied the young man, with a heavy look; “only when my horse fell with me near Saarbruck, you said I was not to take the field again for some time, and left me behind to follow slowly.”

“But you were well enough to overtake us ere we reached Ehrenstein,” rejoined his lord.

“I am quite ready, noble sir,” answered Martin of Dillberg, in a dull tone, “and only feared you might not let me go, remembering that you halted two days on the road, so that I had time to journey leisurely—but I am quite well enough to go, and Heaven knows I do not wish to stay away when anything like glory is to be gained.”

Count Frederick made no answer at the time, but seemed to muse over what had passed. Shortly after the whole party separated to prepare, and by two in the morning all the followers of the two Counts, except a small band left to guard the castle, were assembled in the court. The jester himself was ready, harnessed like a man at arms; but at the last moment,

Count Frederick turned to Martin of Dillberg, and told him he was to remain. The young man affected to remonstrate, but the Count repeated his commands in a grave and not very well pleased tone; and then turning to the jester with a laugh, he added, “You had better stay too, Herr von Narren, though I know in general you are wise enough to go where hard blows are to be got rather than stay within stone walls.”

“Variety, uncle, variety,” said the jester. “I have had enough of stone walls for a time, and do not see why I should not change the inside for the out. Besides, Martin of Dillberg’s company is too great a luxury to be indulged in often—it would make one effeminate.”

The young man gave him a bitter look as he mounted his horse, and shortly after, with several lighted torches before them, to show them their way down the steep descent, the whole party set out upon their expedition, leaving Martin of Dillberg behind them, and the castle soon after relapsed into silence and tranquillity.

## CHAPTER III.

FERDINAND of Altenburg seated himself upon the edge of the pallet, and gave way to thought ; nor must it be denied that after the first excitement of action was over, he felt his position to be one of no inconsiderable pain, difficulty, and danger. Imprisonment, forced solitude, and the deprivation of active exertion, must ever be a heavy burden for eager and busy youth to bear, even for an hour ; but there were many other evils, possible, probable, and actual, which the young gentleman had to contemplate as he sat there and meditated over his fate. To be deprived of the society of her he loved, for many hours, perhaps for many days—to leave all the circumstances, by which his fate and hers might be affected for ever, to be

decided by accident—to know that one for whom he felt an instinctive jealousy and dislike was to be possessed, during his absence, of the blessing of her society, of the treasure which he valued beyond all price and would have guarded for himself with a miser's care, were first among the painful impressions that presented themselves. But then came the questions of how his imprisonment might terminate ; how long it might continue ; what might be the end. Amongst the rude and ruthless acts of those times there were innumerable instances of such threats as those which had been held out by the man who had just left him, being carried into execution. There was something more than a possibility, there was a probability of his being treated as a hostage to ensure the forbearance of the Count of Ehrenstein and his guest ; and, moreover, if his situation failed in deterring them from seeking retribution for the offences of the Baron of Eppenfeld, there was every likelihood of that daring and rapacious nobleman, adding to crimes from the conse-

quences of which he could not escape by putting his prisoner to death. Ferdinand had then to consider, what chance there existed of the two Counts either refraining, out of regard for his safety, from active measures against the Baron, or of their temporising with their enemy till his security was obtained. In regard to Count Frederick, he had indeed some hope, for there was a frank and upright bearing about that prince which had impressed him at once with a belief that he would act in all circumstances in a generous as well as an honourable manner; but when he thought of the Count of Ehrenstein he could flatter himself with no hope of any pause or consideration in his favour, when in the opposite scale was to be placed the recovery of a large sum of gold. Perhaps he did him injustice, but he was inclined to believe that the person must be much more dear to the Count than he was, whose life would not be risked or sacrificed for a certain amount of dueats. His only hope was, that Count Frederick's presence might

have some effect in mitigating his own lord's eagerness. But in matters of life and death such slight chances of escape afford but small consolation, and Ferdinand's mood was certainly somewhat gloomy when the Baron of Eppenfeld's chief officer returned with a man bearing some wine and meat.

The young gentleman banished everything like care from his look, however, as soon as he heard the bolts withdrawn; and he received the provisions with a gay air, saying, "Thanks, thanks, good sir, I hope the wine is good; for this place is not lively, and I shall have nought to while away the hours but wine or sleep, and the bed does not seem a soft one."

"You may have a harder to-morrow," was Fritz's only reply; and withdrawing as soon as the provisions were set down, he left Ferdinand once more to his own thoughts.

For some time the captive touched neither meat nor drink; leaning his head upon his hand, and still meditating more and more sadly. At length, however, he started up, saying, "Well,

it is no use thinking, I must have some food, whatever be the result;" and after eating sparingly, he set the flagon to his lips and took a deep draught. The wine was good, and it cheered him, but he did not repeat the libation; and walking to and fro in his cell, he continued his meditations; now smiling and now frowning, as fancy sometimes brightened and sometimes darkened the prospect of the fate before him. While thus occupied, the small loop-hole window of the cell showed him the grey change in the colouring of the air, which precedes the coming on of night, and he could hear the evening noise of the storks, as they prepared to wing their way up from the stream that ran through the valley below, towards the pinnacles of the castle. Soon after the growing twilight nearly deprived him of all sight in his dull abode; and in a few minutes more all was darkness.

"Well, I will lay me down, and try to sleep," said Ferdinand; and though the drowsy god refused to come at first, yet after a while

his eyes grew heavy, and he fell asleep. His slumbers were disturbed, however, by the same sad and gloomy images which had haunted his waking thoughts, and ere two hours were over, he woke again with a start, and vague apprehensions of he knew not what. For several moments he could not recollect where he was ; but when he had collected his thoughts, and found that the attempt to sleep any more would be in vain, he rose, and walking to the little loop-hole, gazed out upon the narrow space of sky that it offered to his sight.

The valley below seemed to be filled with clouds of mist ; but the height upon which the castle stood raised it above the vapours, and he could see two bright stars—one twinkling, clear, and immovable, high up in the sky, and the other with a softer and more gentle fire, which appeared to move slowly across the lower part of the aperture. Ferdinand's quick imagination speedily found images of human fate and circumstances in what he saw.

“There shines honour and truth above,” he

said; “steadfast to the end ; and there moves love and hope along the course of earthly life, pure and bright, even if less sparkling than the higher light.”

He stood and gazed for nearly half an hour, for there was something attractive in those stars which kept him fixed to the spot. It seemed in his solitude as if there was a companionship in their rays—as if they shone to soothe and cheer him ; and he was still suffering his fancy to sport free amongst the fields of space, when he heard a step approaching, as if some one were about to pass before the loop-hole ; a moment or two after, before it reached the spot where he stood, there was a pause, and then a voice said, “Where is the postern ? It used to be somewhere here. Hundert Schweren ! they cannot have blocked it up.”

“Whose voice is that ?” said Ferdinand, in a low tone. There was an instant pause, and all was again silent, till Ferdinand repeated his question, saying, “Who is there ? I should know the voice.—Is it you, Franz ?”

“Hush!” said the speaker without, and the next instant the lower part of the loop-hole was darkened by what seemed the head of a man.

“Is that you in there, Master Ferdinand?” said the voice of the smith. “Answer quietly, for we may be overheard from above.”

“It is even I, Franz,” answered the young gentleman. “But I fear you are bringing yourself into great peril; and on my account too, if I am not mistaken.”

“Never mind that,” answered the smith. “I have plenty to help me in case of need. But can you tell me where the postern is, lad? I will soon get in if I can but find it.”

“I know not where it is,” answered Ferdinand; “but I saw traces of the passage going on beyond this door. However, when you are in I do not see how you will be able to reach me.”

“Easy enough, easy enough,” answered Franz Creussen. “I know the place of old, and I have not heard that the Baron has laid out much money in altering his castle since he had

it. Besides, I will number the loopholes as I go, and then we shall be sure to get you out."

"Thanks Franz, a thousand thanks," answered the young gentleman. "Were I to stay till to-morrow, I find I should most probably make my exit by a window and a rope."

"Well, keep quiet, and be ready," answered Franz Creussen. "Come along my man, and have the horn ready for a blast. I will keep the door against any ten of them, when once we've got it open, till the men from below can come up." Thus saying, he walked on; but Ferdinand could hear his steps for only six or seven paces farther, and then the worthy smith seemed to stop, and a dull sound was heard, as of some one sawing slowly through a thick and heavy piece of timber. Ferdinand remembered that as he had been carried, or rather pushed along the passage from which the cell entered, he had seen a low door at the end, which might well be a postern leading out upon the rock. But he feared that the sound which

caught his ear might rouse some of the other tenants of the castle, or attract the notice of some watchful sentinels upon the walls. The predatory habits of the Baron of Eppenfeld, however, and the frequent feuds which they entailed with his neighbours, had not taught him that caution which was a part of the natural disposition of the Count of Ehrenstein ; and trusting to the renown of a name which had become terrible, and the natural strength of his hold, he maintained a very different watch from that which his captive had been accustomed to see practised. His soldiery, too, imitating the habits of their leader, were by no means exempt from his vices ; and an alternation of cunning schemes, fierce enterprises, and reckless revelry, formed the life of the inhabitants of Eppenfeld. A number of the men had been sent out the night before upon different errands affecting the peculiar circumstances in which the Baron was placed. The rest had finished their carouse as soon as the capture of Ferdinand and his companions was effected ; and a solitary watch-

man, placed on a high tower, solaced his loneliness by a long and comfortable nap, with his back resting against the battlements.

Thus no ear but Ferdinand's heard the sound, which ceased much sooner than he expected, and drawing near to the door, he listened eagerly, till at length he heard the creaking of rusty hinges, and then a step in the passage. The next instant he distinguished the drawing of bolts, but it was not the door of his own cell which they had unfastened, and he then knocked gently with his hand, to indicate the place of his confinement. The step then came on, the heavy wooden bar was removed, the other fastenings undone, and his eye, accustomed to the darkness, could make out the tall figure of the smith, as he bent down to look in.

“Are you there, lad?” said Franz Creussen. “Ay, I see you now; come along, come along; have you any arms?”

“My sword they have got, and my head-piece,” answered Ferdinand; “the rest they left me. Let us away, Franz. I can get arms

hereafter; yet I would fain, were it possible, free the poor fellows who were with me."

"Oh! they will be safe enough," answered Franz Creussen; "you were the only one in danger. We must lose no time, for we have got far to go, and may have much to do.—But we'll leave the doors open behind us, that the Counts may get in; for I dare say these swine will not find it out till they have the spears of Ehrenstein under their walls."

Thus saying, he hurried away down the passage to the postern door, where one of his stout workmen was standing; and somewhat to his surprise, Ferdinand now found that both master and man were completely armed.

"Why, Franz," he said, in a low voice; "you look like a knight."

"Ay," answered Franz Creussen, merrily; "they always told me I look worse than I am. But come along, come along, and mind your footing, for on my life there are some spots where it is not safe to pass."

Slowly wending their way along upon the

narrow ledge of rock immediately under the walls of the castle on that side, with the deep valley wrapped in mists and shadows beneath them, and the blue sky with its thousand bright eyes twinkling up above, they came at the end of about a hundred yards, to a narrow footway down the front of the rock, not much less dangerous than the beetling summit which they had just quitted. In the bottom of the valley, about a mile from Eppenfeld, they found a large party of men and horses waiting for them, with a led horse over and above the number of the smith's companions, showing clearly that he had little doubted, from the first, that he should be able to set his young friend free. Few words were spoken, but mounting quickly, they took their way towards Anweiler, and ere long left that small place behind them.

“Now we are safe enough,” said Franz Creussen; “for though the beast of Eppenfeld may perhaps pursue you farther, if he should find that you are gone, he will go straight towards Ehrenstein, and we must take another

path. We may as well separate, however, and send some of the men on the direct road, then their horses' feet will mislead him."

This plan was accordingly followed, and the smith and his young companion, with five or six more of the party, took their way down towards the valley of the Rhine, and then made a circuit to the left, in the direction of Durkheim, while the rest followed the straight road over the hills.

Little was said, either by Franz Creussen or Ferdinand, as they rode at the head of the troop; but at length, at the crossing of the road, the smith suddenly drew in his rein, saying, "I forgot to tell the men, if they met with the Counts and their party, to say that they would find the postern door open. Ride off after them, Peterkin, as fast as you can; straight up that road to the left there.—You may as well take all the other men with you, for we sha'n't need them here. The Baron won't dare to come down into this open country.—But let some one give Master Ferdinand a

lance, or at worst a sword ; though I think a sword is the best of the two after all."

"The Counts won't set out till they hear or see something of me," said Ferdinand ; "or at all events not before to-morrow."

"I don't know that," answered Franz Creussen. "Your lord might not, but he has got a better man with him ; and as to their hearing, they 've heard long ago,—get ye gone, Peterkin, and take the men, as I told you."

These orders were obeyed as promptly as if he had been a military commander ; and the smith and his young companion rode on at a slow pace for about half a mile.

At length Ferdinand remarked, "I think we could get forward quicker, Franz ; the horses don't seem tired."

"Ay, but I want to talk to you a bit, Master Ferdinand ; I 've long wished it, and now I 've got the opportunity.—But look there,—lights moving along the hills. The two Counts, take my word for it. But never you mind, come

on towards Ehrenstein. You may do as much good there as where they are going."

"I think so too, Franz," answered Ferdinand; "and I am anxious to get there fast; for Father George wishes to see me to-night, and it must be now near two."

"Ah! that alters the case," answered Franz Creussen. "We'll spur on then.—Two, why its past three by this time;" and striking his horse with his spur, he trotted quickly along the road.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE travellers paused not till they had to turn their horses up the side of the hills; but then the beasts slackened their pace without the riders drawing the rein, for the ascent was steep, and the roads not so good as they are now. A wide wood covered the slopes; and the path wound in and out amongst the trees, while glimpses of the rising moon were seen through the brakes, where the leafy screen fell away; and often a straggling ray of moonlight was caught pouring over the bushes, even where the bright orb of night was invisible to the eye of the wanderer.

“I know not how to offer you my thanks, Franz,” said Ferdinand of Altenburg, as he

laid down the bridle on the beast's neck. "I know you would have no wordy gratitude; and I must not hope that you will ever be in circumstances which may enable me to return you the kindness you have shown me. Nevertheless I hope some occasion may come when I can prove to you how deeply I feel it."

"God send that Franz Creussen may ever want help as little as he needs it now," answered the stout smith; "and God send he may ever be as able and as willing to lend it to those who deserve it, Master Ferdinand. I know not which would be the greatest curse, to be unwilling though able, or to be willing and yet unable, to aid a good fellow-creature in his need. The first, methinks; for though in the latter case one might feel much pain, in the former one would have no pleasure. But it is not gratitude or service in return, one works for. One hammers iron for pay; but one does not do what is kind for recompence of any sort.

On the contrary, I think one takes a greater pleasure in serving a person who can never repay it, especially when one has served him before. Now I have had a kindness for you from your boyhood. Do you remember when you used to come to me from the Abbey to give you fishing lines to catch the poor shining fellows out of the stream—the White fish and the May fish? A little curly-headed urchin you were then, as wild as a young roe deer, but not half so timid."

"I remember it well, Franz," replied Ferdinand, "those were happy days, and I shall never forget them. You were always very kind to me, and I believe used to spoil me, and do everything I asked you."

"Not a whit, not a whit," cried the smith. "I pitched you into the river once when you were over wilful, just to cool your fire; and then I pulled you out again, and laughed at you, which did you more good than the wetting.—But that was a long time ago—you were just six years old then."

“I recollect it well,” answered the young gentleman, “and it served me right. I have never failed to think of it when I have felt inclined to give way to angry impatience. It was just by the mill pond.”

“Ay, your memory is good,” said the smith, “can you remember anything before that?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Ferdinand, after a moment’s thought; “I can recollect many things that happened at the Abbey. I can remember, when the Abbot Waldimer died, the great bell tolling, and how hard it was for Father George to teach me to read and write.”

“Ay, but before that?” asked Franz Creussen. “Can you recall any other place, before you were at the Abbey.”

“Sometimes I think I do,” was the young gentleman’s reply. “You know, Franz, when one is riding along in the night, everything will seem dark and indistinct around one, with trees, and rocks, and houses, all faint, and scarcely to be distinguished one from the other, taking strange shapes and un-

natural forms ; and then, if one passes the open door of a cottage where there is a light burning, or a forge like yours, one suddenly sees a small space around, all clear and defined ; and then the minute after everything is dark again. Now the past seems to me just like that. I see, when I turn my eyes to the days of my childhood, a number of strange vague things, of which I can make out the forms but faintly, and know not what they are ; but here and there comes a spot of brightness, where all seems as if it were now before my eyes."

" Ay, that is curious," said the smith. " Can you tell me any of these matters that you recollect so clearly ? "

Ferdinand paused a moment, and then answered, " I am sure I can trust you, Franz ; but Father George warned me to tell no one at the castle anything I may be able to remember of my early days."

" I am not of the castle," answered Franz Creussen ; " and besides, if I chose, I could tell

you more of those days than you yourself could tell me."

"Indeed," answered Ferdinand; "I remember you, it is true, ever since my boyhood, but still, I do not see your figure in any of those visions which sometimes come back upon me."

"Ay, but I've held you in my arms when you were not a twelvemonth old," said his companion, "and carried you at my saddle-bow during six hours of a long night. It is true I did not see you for years after, till Franz Creussen became the Abbey smith, and you the ward of Father George. But tell me what you recollect, lad, for you may tell me safely. I can keep counsel, as you may see; but things are now coming to a close, and it is right we should all understand each other."

"The first thing I can recollect," said the young gentleman; "seems to me a fine house in a small town, with gardens and trees, and a beautiful lady I called mother,—that is a pleasant dream, Franz, full of happy things, sports of childhood, joys in flowers, and in birds' songs,

—I am sure I remember it well, for nobody has talked to me about those things since, and it cannot be all fancy.”

“No, no,” answered Franz Creussen; “it is all true, quite true, and the lady was your mother! What more?”

“The next thing I remember,” continued the young man; “is a less happy day. It seems as if I had been playing at my mother’s knee in that same house—it was not a castle, but like the dwelling of some rich burgher,—and then suddenly came in a messenger, with what seemed evil tidings; for the lady wept, and in a few minutes all was bustle and confusion, packing up clothes and other things in haste; and then people spurring away at fiery speed, till I was weary, and fell asleep.”

“Ay, ay, who carried you, then?” said the smith; “who but Franz Creussen? What do you recollect next?”

“There must have been a long interval,” replied Ferdinand; “for I was a bigger boy then; and of the intervening time I remem-

ber little or nothing; but shortly after that it seems as if I was very lonely and sad, and seldom saw my mother, till one night I was called into a room where she lay upon a bed propped up with pillows, and there were priests in the room, and men in black gowns, and the girl called Caroline, who used to nurse me; but my mother's face was sadly changed then,—it was thin and sharp, and pale, and the lips seemed bloodless, but her eyes were exceedingly bright, and her teeth as white as driven snow. She had a crucifix lying before her,—I recollect it well—a black cross with an ivory figure on it,—and she put her arms round my neck, and kissed me often, and prayed God to bless me, and make me happier and more fortunate than my father and herself.—That was not long before I went to the Abbey, I think; but I never saw her after.”

Franz Creussen was silent for a moment or two, apparently from some emotion of the mind, but at length he answered, in a low tone, “She died that night, Ferdinand. You re-

member more than I thought, and I doubt not a few words would make you remember much more still. But here we are upon the top of the hill, and if Father George requires you to-night, it will be well for you to ride on quickly, for the day will be dawning ere long."

"I had better go to the castle first," replied Ferdinand; "for if the Count be not on his way to Eppenfeld, he may blame me for delay."

"No need, no need," answered the smith; "he is on the way, I am sure; but we shall find some of the men at the forge, who will tell us. There lies the village, not a hundred yards in advance."

The tidings they received at the blacksmith's dwelling showed, as he had expected, that the Count of Ehrenstein had passed nearly an hour before, and that, having met, farther on, and questioned some of the party to whom Ferdinand owed his deliverance, he had sent back a message by them, commanding his young follower not to join him at Eppenfeld, but to remain at the Castle of Ehrenstein till his return.

Bidding adieu to the smith, with hearty thanks, Ferdinand spurred on alone, but paused for a moment at the chapel in the wood, and knocked at the door of the good priest. At first no answer was returned, but a second summons soon roused Father George from his slumbers, and brought him to the door.

The grey dawn was now beginning to break, and as soon as the priest beheld the face of his young ward, he exclaimed, “Not to-night, Ferdinand, not to-night.—Night do I call it? Heaven help us! it is morning. See you not the sun coming up there? To-morrow night, my boy, as soon as all in the castle are asleep, come down, and bring the lady with you. I pray this Baron of Eppenfeld may keep the Counts before his tower for a day or two.”

“I doubt that such will be the case, good Father,” answered Ferdinand, “for there is a postern open, and they have tidings of it.”

“That is unlucky,” said the priest, “but speed you on to the castle, and hide well your purpose from every eye. Let no one see you

thoughtful or agitated, and go early to rest, as if you were tired with the labours of the days past. Away, Ferdinand, away."

The young man waved his hand and rode on, and in a few minutes his horse was in front of the great gates. Beckoning to one of the sentinels on the walls, he told him to go down and wake the warder to let him in. But the man came down himself, and unbarred the gates, while Ferdinand, dismounting, led his horse across the draw-bridge.

"Ha! God's benison on you, Master Ferdinand!" said the soldier. "You have luck to get out of the castle of Eppenfeld. How did you manage that?"

"I will tell you all another time, Henry," replied the young gentleman. "I am tired now, and hungry, to say sooth. Who is in the castle?"

"Why, the Count went forth some time ago," replied the man, "and left nought but a guard of twenty men, with the women, and Count Frederick's priest, and him they call Martin of Dillberg."

Ferdinand muttered something to himself which the soldier did not hear, and then led on his horse towards the stable. None of the grooms were up ; but every young gentleman in those days was well accustomed to tend his own horse, and, though it must be confessed, the escaped captive did what was necessary for his poor charger as rapidly as possible, yet he did not neglect him. As soon as this duty was accomplished, he hurried back into the castle ; and had any one been watching him, it might have been observed that his step became more light and noiseless as he ascended the great stairs, and passed along the corridor, which stretched across one entire side of the principal mass of the building. At the door next but one to that of the Count of Ehrenstein, he paused for several moments, and looked up with an anxious and hesitating look, as if he doubted whether he should go in. But the morning light was by this time shining clear through the casements ; he heard the sound of persons moving below, and for Adelaide's sake he forbore, and walked on

towards the narrow staircase which led to his own chamber. Ere he had taken ten steps, however, a sound, as slight as the whisper of the summer wind, caused him to stop and turn his head ; and he saw the face of Bertha looking out from her mistress's apartments. Instantly going back as noiselessly as possible, he whispered, “Is your lady waking? Can I come in?”

“Not unless you are mad,” answered Bertha. “She has been up all night, and I too, God wot—though I have slept comfortably in the corner. But thank Heaven you are safe and well, for her little foolish heart would break easy enough if anything were to happen to your unworthiness. But what news? When did you return?”

“I am but this instant back,” answered the lover, “I have been captive at Eppenfeld, and only freed by good Franz Creussen. Tell her that I have seen Father George, however, and that he says—mark well, Bertha—to-morrow night, as soon as all is quiet in the castle. She will soon understand.”

“ Oh, I understand, too,” answered Bertha, “ for I have seen Father George as well as you —forced to go down to do your errands. Well, poor souls, as there is no other to help you, I must. But now tell me how is all this to be arranged?”

“ I will come, I will come,” replied Ferdinand, “ as soon as every one is asleep.”

“ Well, on my word, you gain courage quickly,” exclaimed Bertha. “ You will come! What, here?”

“ Ay, anywhere,” rejoined Ferdinand; “ if it cost me life, pretty Bertha, I would come—but hark, there are people stirring above—Tell your lady—adieu.”

“ Be cautious, be cautious, rash young man,” said the girl, and instantly drawing back, closed the door.

On the stairs Ferdinand encountered Martin of Dillberg, who would fain have stopped him to speak of his adventures; but the former passed on, after a brief answer to the youth’s inquiry regarding his escape; and Martin of

Dillberg proceeded on his way, with his lip curling for a moment in a sneering smile, which faded away quickly, and gave place to a look of deep and anxious thought.

Ferdinand sought no great length of repose; but was speedily down again in the halls of the castle, on the battlements, in the corridors, in the hope of somewhere meeting her he loved. Nor was he disappointed; for some hours before noon, Adelaide came forth, with hopes and wishes like his own, to walk upon the walls.—But hardly had she and Ferdinand met—not ten words had been spoken between them—when Martin of Dillberg was at the lady's side; and thus during the whole day were they deprived of all means of direct communication. As if he divined their object, and was resolved to frustrate it, the youth was always on the watch, ever near, never abashed, although the effect of his presence on their conversation was only too visible. Thus passed by hour after hour, till towards evening, tidings arrived that the two Counts were still beneath

the walls of Eppenfeld, and that but little progress had been made in the siege. Ferdinand questioned the messenger as to whether the postern by which he had escaped had been attempted; but upon that point the man could give him no information; and the young gentleman thought it his duty to send the soldier back to his lord with intelligence—in case the news which had been formerly sent had been misunderstood or not received—and with a request that he might be permitted to join the attacking force on the following day.

For one brief moment, soon after the messenger had departed, Adelaide and her lover were alone together; and ere their tormentor was upon them again, she had time to say, “Bertha has told me all, dear Ferdinand, I shall be ready.”

Not long after, she retired to her own apartments for the night; and her lover remained in the hall with Martin of Dillberg and Count Frederick’s chaplain, trying to weary them out, till nearly eleven o’clock at night. Then

declaring that he was tired with all that he had done during the preceding day,—which was true enough,—he withdrew to his own chamber, and there sat meditating over the happiness of the coming hour. The moments seemed sadly long; it appeared as if the sounds of voices speaking and closing doors would never end; but at length the noises ceased, one after the other; and after waiting half an hour without hearing anything stir within the walls, with a beating but happy heart, Ferdinand approached his door, opened it, and listened.

## CHAPTER V.

THE whole castle of Eppenfeld slept as tranquilly for several hours after Ferdinand of Altenburg had left it, as if no danger had threatened its lord, and no troops were marching to attack it; and it is very probable that the evasion of the young captive, and the means of entrance which he had left open for the enemy, would not have been discovered till chance or humanity led some one in the place to send him food, had it not been for an accidental event which happened during the night. We have seen that one of the motives for preventing the young gentleman's return to his lord, was to afford time for storing the castle with provisions; and various parties

had been sent out to scour the country for that purpose. Some of the leaders went nearly drunk, and returned sober, and some went sober and returned nearly drunk. Amongst the latter was a personage who, accompanied by two companions, found his way to a village where they enjoyed themselves for a couple of hours; and then, finding it late, and no progress made in their foray, they rode on to the side of a hill, where the villagers were accustomed to feed their swine, and possessing themselves of the unruly beasts, commenced the far more difficult enterprise of driving them to the castle. Now the distance could scarcely be less than ten miles; and if any one considers what it is for three men, not very sober, to drive sixty swine such a distance, he will not be surprised that the task occupied many hours. Nevertheless, on approaching the castle, which they did by the lesser entrance at the back, the marauders found their flock shorn of its fair proportions, and not more than forty of the beasts which

never chew the cud could be mustered, notwithstanding all the counting which the three soldiers could accomplish. One of the hogs had run one way, another another. One had committed suicide by throwing itself into a stream, rather than follow the course on which fate and circumstances were driving it; another had been run through the body by one of the soldiers, somewhat too eager in pursuit; others had rushed back between the horses, and had effected their escape; while others again lay down upon the road, and refused to move even when the lance galled their sturdy chines.

Within a mile of Eppenfeld, however, the leader fancied that he had got the remainder of the herd in security, for the road was narrow, and led straight up to the lesser gate of the castle. Unfortunately, however, the small foot-path communicating with the postern, branched off on the right hand of the road about a hundred yards distance from the walls. Though it was night, and the whole party, horse and foot, was tired, a brisk young porker, who

seemed to set fatigue at defiance, instantly perceived the way to the postern, and as it was evidently a path which his drivers did not wish to pursue, he darted towards it, with a sort of caracole, and a grunt of intimation to his companions. The hint was not lost upon them, and with one universal whine of delight, the whole herd were instantly running along the path, and thence pursuing their way by the narrow ledge of rock under the wall of the castle.

To follow on horseback was out of the question, but two of the men instantly sprang to the ground, with a multitude of curious and high-sounding German oaths, and rushed after the bristly fugitives. Even then the open postern might have escaped observation, had not pigs been fond of strange places ; but exactly at the spot where the small door stood open, a halt took place amongst the herd, and a tremendous pressure from behind was the consequence. Five or six were pitched over the edge of the rock, fracturing their skulls as they fell, and the rest, finding that hesitation was destruction,

parted into two bodies, the one pursuing its way straightforward towards the opposite road through the valley, the others rushing, jostling, and squeaking, into the castle, as if it had been a great sty, for which, indeed, they might very well mistake it.

The pursuit of the first troop was evidently useless, and the two men, turning after the second division, proceeded to close the door to secure their prey, and then, for the first time, perceived that a large portion of wood-work, between the iron bands which secured the door, had been sawn away. To have found the postern open would have been nothing very marvellous in their eyes, considering the state of discipline in which they lived; but the work of the saw was convincing proof to them that somebody had been sawing; and driving the pigs before them into the court-yard, they at once proceeded to inquire who the sawyer was.

The whole castle was speedily roused and in an uproar; and what between the capture of the pigs, as they galloped about the wide court-

yard, the instant putting of them to death, in not the most scientific manner, for want of food to keep them in a living and unsalted state, and the various operations for rendering the postern even more defensible than before, the active labours of the whole garrison were not over when daylight broke upon the castle, and the spears and pennons of the forces of Ehrenstein and Leiningen were seen coming up the valley.

The Baron laughed loud and long, as he watched the approach of the enemy. "Not a hundred and fifty men," he exclaimed; "on my life! I have a great mind to go out and meet them; why we have eighty here within the walls, and methinks the reiters of Eppenfeld are at least worth double those of Ehrenstein—but we will let them waste themselves upon the postern, for doubtless that young coistrel will direct them thither."

"I rather think they will strive to take us by famine, my valiant lord," replied Fritz, who was standing by him; "for depend upon it

they have made such speed in order to prevent us from providing against a siege."

"Then we will give the lie to their expectations," cried the Baron of Eppenfeld. "Ho! bring us some good stout beams here. We will hang out a new sort of banner, such as they have never seen. Plant one firmly in every tower, and then bring up the carcasses of the pigs and oxen."

Under his directions the slaughtered cattle were pulled up aloft, and hung out from the battlements, like the banners of those days; and for some minutes the approaching force could not make out the meaning of this strange display.

"By Heaven! I believe he has hanged the poor fellows who went with our young friend Ferdinand," exclaimed Count Frederick, as the pigs, being the lightest, were first swung up to the top of the beams.

"Nay, nay, my good lord," cried Sickendorf, "they seem to me like swine. Ay, and there goes an ox, too, depend upon it he intends

to show us that he can hold out for a month or two."

"Let us to the postern with all speed," said old Karl of Mosbach; "he may find us in the donjon ere dinner time to help him eat his pork."

"Let it be well reconnoitred first," said the Count of Ehrenstein; "there is no use of our throwing away men's lives upon a useless attempt. It is evident that he is prepared to receive us. He has probably divined that we would come so soon, from the discovery of the lad's escape; and if so, depend upon it, the postern has been strengthened."

A party was accordingly detached to examine carefully the approach to the proposed point of attack, and advanced some way up the path leading from the valley. The walls of the castle were fully manned; and hand guns not having been yet invented, bows and cross-bows were bent against the enemy: but not an arrow was discharged or a quarrel let fly, till the men of Ehrenstein having advanced con-

siderably within range, discovered that the postern was blocked up in such a manner as would render any attack upon it hopeless with so small a force. No sooner did they commence their retreat, however, than a flight of missiles assailed them from the walls, greatly hastening their speed, and wounding several.

“Ah, ha!” cried the Baron, “they have had enough of the postern, and they will soon have had enough of the castle. It is too hard a stone for the teeth of these two poor Counts!”

But the worthy lord greatly miscalculated the character of one at least of his adversaries. The Count of Ehrenstein, indeed, would very willingly have accepted the liberation of his men as compensation for all offences; but the Baron did not even think fit to give the slightest sign of making that reparation; and Count Frederick was not a man to suffer any difficulties to divert him in his efforts to wipe out what he considered as both an insult and an injury. Shortly after the return of the recon-

noitring party to their companions, various movements were observed amongst the assailants which somewhat puzzled the people on the walls, and discouraged the more wary and experienced. Three or four horsemen rode off in different directions at full speed; and the rest of the forces, dividing into two parties, posted themselves on the roads on either side of the castle, while the two Counts, with some ten or twelve picked men, took up their position under the shade of a large clump of beech trees, on the side of the hill opposite to the postern, whence both of the principal gates of Eppenfeld could be seen, and succour afforded to either of the bodies of assailants in case a sortie should be made from the walls. There dismounting from their horses, the two noblemen and their followers stretched themselves on the grass, and seemed calmly waiting for the result of the steps they had taken.

“ Depend upon it, my good lord, they have sent to Neustadt for a party of those dogged

citizens," said Fritz, "or perhaps to Landau for cannon."

"Nonsense and folly!" exclaimed the Baron, "they can never drag cannon up here. Why, the great pierrier of Landau weighs a couple of ton, and the little one a ton. They may bring a falconet, but that will do no good; and as to the pigs of Neustadt, we will slaughter them as they come, and send them home pickled to their fat wives."

Still it was evident that the worthy lord was by no means comfortable; and his uneasiness increased when he saw the men of Leiningen begin to cut down and shape some stout trees. He had so frequently beheld persons of power and courage, whom he had injured or offended, turn away, hopeless of redress, after a short demonstration against his stronghold, that he had calculated boldly upon such being the case in the present instance, and the signs of resolution and perseverance displayed by the two Counts, showed him plainly that the

far more serious and discouraging affair of a siege was likely to follow. With dogged resolution, however, he held to resistance, and the only effect upon his mind was to make him take immediate measures for still further strengthening the defences of his castle. Great beams were placed across the gates, and the lower part of each was piled up with rubbish, which was very abundant within the building. The stones of the court-yard were taken up and carried to the battlements, to cast down upon the heads of any of the assailants who might venture to approach the walls; and several of the men, more dexterous than the rest, were set to provide stores of arrows and bolts, lest the provision already made should be exhausted. At the same time considerable quantities of wine were distributed amongst the men, to keep up their spirits; and as a warning to the rest, one of the soldiers, who ventured to hint that it might be better for the Baron to accommodate matters with the two Counts, had the lobes of his ears slit with a

short dagger: his lord declaring that he was only fit to wear earrings.

Nevertheless, there was something in the calm immobility of the enemy, which created very unpleasant sensations in the bosom of the Baron of Eppenfeld. It was evident that they were waiting for farther assistance, and the perfect tranquillity of their aspect led him to believe that they felt confident that assistance would be complete and overpowering. Though not a very imaginative man, he tortured his fancy during the whole day, to divine whence and of what kind the expected succour would be. But about half an hour before nightfall, all doubts upon the subject were brought to an end, by the appearance, first, of a large body of pikemen on foot, in whom he instantly recognised, by their banners, the commons of several neighbouring towns, who had suffered by his spirit of appropriation, and, secondly, of a considerable force of horse bearing the cognizance of the House of Hardenburg. Worse than all, however, were seen, in the

midst, two long wagons, dragged slowly forward by eight or ten bullocks, each displaying a large, clumsy-looking implement, somewhat like the lopped trunk of a tree, which he had little doubt were neither more nor less than the two great cannon of Landau, against which, if once brought to bear upon the gates, the castle could not stand an hour. His only hope was, that their bulk and weight would render them unserviceable; but Count Frederick of Leiningen was seen to ride down instantly to meet his advancing allies, and by the time that night fell, two of the wheels had been detached from the wagons, together with the axle, and the larger cannon had been swung between them so dexterously, and with such an even balance, that it was moved without difficulty at least two or three hundred yards on the road to Eppenfeld.

The fall of night prevented it from being used immediately; but there it remained just before the gates, at the distance of perhaps two bowshots, haunting the imagination of the Baron with the thought of its fire on the

succeeding day. Still he strove to make the evening meal pass cheerfully, and plenty of his best wine was poured forth to raise the courage of the soldiery ; but, alas, without effect. The great gun of Landau was a sort of nightmare, which sat upon the stomachs of the stout men-at-arms ; and a better means could not have been devised of sparing the provisions of the garrison, than by bringing it before the gates.

Some of the garrison drank deep indeed, either from pure recklessness, or a keen sense of danger, which they wished to get rid of by the pleasantest process at hand ; but the wine seemed all to be poured into the great gun of Landau ; for it certainly produced no greater effect upon those who imbibed it than it would have done upon that huge mass of wood and iron. The watch fires that were now seen blazing around the castle on every side, showed that the Leaguer was strict, and that no path of escape was unguarded ; and though the Baron affected to be jovial, and to laugh at the Counts and their men, who were forced to

sleep under the canopy of heaven, yet there was a wandering and uncertain look in his eye, and an anxious glance every now and then to the countenance of his friend Fritz, which told that the mind within was anything but easy.

At length, as if he could bear it no longer, the Baron rose, and beckoned his lieutenant into a little chamber in the neighbouring tower, where the propriety of a surrender, on conditions, was formally discussed, without any consideration of the ears that had been slit a few hours before.

“ You had better send some one out, my lord,” said Fritz, “ to say that you will give up the prisoners and the treasure. I would not offer more at first; for, depend upon it, they ’ll demand more, and you can but grant at last.”

“ But who can I send?” said the Baron. “ If I choose one of our own men, he will either get drunk amongst the enemy, or go over to their party.”

“That’s very likely,” answered Fritz; “shall I go?”

“Humph! I can’t spare you,” said the Baron.

“Well, then, send one of the prisoners,” rejoined Fritz. “If he stays, it can’t be helped; and we can offer him reward if he comes back. We had better not let the men know anything about it.”

This course was accordingly adopted. One of the men of Ehrenstein, who seemed the most sagacious of the party, was led by Fritz to a postern opposite to that which had been blocked up, and despatched with a message to the two Counts. Fritz remained to watch for his return upon the battlements above; and the Baron himself went back to the flask, to console expectation as well as he could.

“He will be here in a couple of hours, I dare say,” said the Baron; but his enemies did not make him wait so long. At the end of an hour, Fritz appeared with the messenger, who bore a scrap of written paper in his hand.

“What the devil is this?” said the Baron, looking at it askance, as the man handed it to him. “Does he think we’ve clerks and shavelings here in Eppenfeld? Could he not speak plain German, and send message for message?”

Fritz gazed at it with the same hopeless look; but the messenger relieved them from their difficulty by saying, “He read it over to me twice; so I can tell you what it means. Let me look at the marks, however, to bring it in my mind. Thus it runs:—‘Count Frederick of Leiningen,—ay, that’s his name there—‘and the Count of Ehrenstein to the Baron of Eppenfeld.’ He requires the immediate surrender of the castle, the restoration of the treasure taken from the Venetian merchants, compensation from the goods of the Baron for the wrong done and the trouble given. ‘Upon these conditions his life shall be spared; but the castle shall be levelled with the ground, and never rebuilt.’”

The man paused; and the Baron of Eppenfeld swore an oath, such as probably no mouth

but that of one of the robber chivalry of those days ever contained or gave vent to. It terminated, however, with a vow, that he would die under the ruins of his stronghold, sooner than submit to such conditions; and his worthy lieutenant was quite sure he would keep his word. Neither, it must be confessed, did Fritz himself greatly differ in opinion from his lord. The castle of Eppenfeld was, in fact, his principal means of subsistence; and, although he might perhaps have found some other, if it were taken away, yet there was none on the face of the earth that he thought worth living for; and a gallant defence and death, sword in hand, were things too frequently in the contemplation of persons in his station, to cause him much emotion at the prospect of their being realized.

Fritz, however, was somewhat shrewder in his observations than the Baron; and as soon as the latter had done blaspheming, the lieutenant inquired, addressing their messenger, "Whom did you see, fellow? You bring a letter from

both the Counts; yet, when you speak of them, you say always, 'He,' as if only one had had a hand in it."

"I saw Count Frederick of Leiningen," answered the messenger; "but he said he had power to write for both, as my own lord was sleeping: and now I pray you send me back as you promised. It may go worse with you, if you do not."

"You shall go—you shall go," replied Fritz, "for you will have a message to take back;" and then drawing the Baron aside for a moment or two, he spoke to him eagerly in a whisper.

"By the eleven thousand virgins thou art right," cried the lord of Eppenfeld at length; "so shall it be. Go back, rascal," he continued, addressing the messenger, "and tell Count Frederick that he shall rot before Eppenfeld, and I will eat the stones thereof, before I take such conditions. Tell him I care not for his bombards; the walls are proof against them, and he will find this hold a harder morsel

than he thinks. That for Count Frederick!—But now mark me—seek out your own lord privately, and say to him that I love him better than his comrade, that I served him well in former times, and that if he will withdraw his people, and leave me to deal with Count Frederick alone, he shall have the treasure; but if not, I will send a message by nine of the clock to-morrow morning to him and his friend, just to remind him of how I did serve him many years ago. Mark me well, say every word just as I say it;” and he repeated the whole with great accuracy.

The man promised to obey, and, again conducted by Fritz, was led out of the castle.

“That will diminish them by one-half,” said the Baron, as soon as his lieutenant returned to him, “and then for one bold stroke and victory.”

Numerous discussions subsequently took place between the lord of Eppenfeld and his friend, in regard to preparations for the morrow; numerous precautions were also taken; strict watch

was enjoined ; but then, alas ! the Baron and Fritz also returned to the flask, and many others in the castle followed their example. The lieutenant, at a late hour, betook himself to the walls, where he found all in order, and paced up and down some time in a sort of dreamy state, where thought and wine contended for the mastery ; but the hour of three found him sound asleep upon the battlements, with his head pillow'd on a stone.

How long he remained thus Fritz did not know ; but the first thing that woke him was a tremendous explosion just below. The whole castle shook ; some of the loose stones fell from the watch-tower above, and well it was for Fritz, at that moment, that he had his steel morion on his head. He was hardly roused, however, his whole senses were in confusion and disarray, when loud shouts and cries from the court rose up, and conveyed him better intelligence of the event which had taken place than even the explosion ; there were sounds of blows, and clashing steel, and of heavy axes falling upon

wood-work, and exclamations of “Place taken! Place taken! Yield or die!” with many a similar speech, which showed clearly enough that the garrison was not alone in Eppenfeld.

The want of brute courage, however, was not the defect of Fritz’s character, and the next instant he dashed down, sword in hand, to the court, collecting one or two of his comrades as he went, and exclaiming, “It is now for life! they will give no quarter! fight like devils! we may yet drive them back!” But the scene that presented itself in the court might have proved to any one willing to be convinced, that, fight how they would, the garrison of Eppenfeld had no chance of successful resistance. The gate had been partly blown in by the bombard, which had been quietly drawn close up to the walls, and was every moment presenting a wider aperture under the blows of the axe; an overpowering number of adverse soldiery was already in the court; others were rushing in through the gap in the gate; torches could be seen coming up

the slope, and displaying a stream of human heads cased in iron pouring on. Everything proved that defence was hopeless, but the Baron of Eppenfeld was already below, and with fierce efforts, aided by some thirty of his men, was striving to drive back the assailants and recover possession of the gateway. Fritz and those who were with him hurried on to his assistance, and soon were hand to hand with the enemy. Their arrival gave some new vigour to the resistance, and the men of Leiningen and the citizens who were joined with them, gave way a little; but fresh numbers poured in behind; the Baron went down with a thundering blow upon his steel cap; and Fritz received a wound in the throat which covered his cuirass with gore.

With great difficulty the Lord of Eppenfeld was raised in the press, and borne somewhat back; but as soon as he could stand he rushed upon the enemy again, and aimed his blows around with the fury of despair. His men gradually gave way, how-

ever, a number fell never to rise again; but beaten back, step by step, they were, at length, forced against the wall of the donjon, with nothing but the narrow doorway behind them left as a means of escape. The man who was nearest it felt his courage yield, turned, and ran towards the postern on the east. Some cried, “I yield, I yield! good quarter, good quarter!” Others fled after the first, and the Baron of Eppenfeld, seeing that all was lost, looked round with glaring eyes, doubtful whether he should seek safety in flight by the postern into the open country, or die in arms where he stood.

At that very moment, however, a loud voice cried, “Take him alive! take him alive! The man with the wivern on his head!” and half a dozen of the soldiers of Leiningen rushed towards him. One instantly went down under a blow of his sword, but before it could fall again upon the head of another, the rest were upon him, and the weapon was wrenched from his grasp.

A scene of wild confusion followed, which cannot be adequately described. There was chasing through passages and chambers, hunting out fugitives in remote places, driving them along the walls, seeking them in vaults and towers; and many a deep groan and shrill cry of the death agony attested that all the barbarous cruelties of a storming were perpetrated in the halls of Eppenfeld. Some were taken alive, but a greater number escaped by the postern into the country. There, however, they were almost instantly captured; for the bands of the Count of Ehrenstein had been left to keep guard without, and only two or three of the fugitives found their way to the woods.

In the mean time Count Frederick as soon as all resistance was over, strode on to the hall, with a small number of his attendants who had never left his side. There seating himself in the Baron's great chair, he ordered the room to be cleared of all persons but two, while a party remained to guard the door. His selection of his two councillors was somewhat

strange, for, though one was indeed a person in whom he might be supposed to place confidence, being an old and faithful knight who had accompanied him through all his wars while serving with the knights of St. John, the other was no greater a personage than the jester, who, however, took his seat beside the Count with great gravity.

The next moment, according to orders previously given, the Baron of Eppenfeld was brought in between two men, with all his offensive arms taken from him, and his head uncovered. The two soldiers who guarded him there were instantly ordered to withdraw, and what followed between the victor and the vanquished was only known to the four who remained. The conversation was not long, however, for in less than five minutes the soldiers were recalled, and ordered to remove the Baron to his own chamber, treating him with courtesy.

The man named Fritz was next called for, and while the Count's followers were seeking

for him, one of Count Frederick's knights brought him the keys of the treasure room, and a roll of papers. Several minutes elapsed before Fritz could be found, and just as he was discovered at length, lying severely wounded amongst the dead in the court, the Count of Ehrenstein, entered the castle with some of his attendants, and after inquiring where Count Frederick was, made his way to the hall, which he seemed to know well.

“Is the Baron living or dead?” he asked, as soon as he entered.

“Living, living, my noble friend,” replied Count Frederick, in his usual gay tone. “Caught like a badger; dug out of his hole, and biting at all who came near him.”

“He might as well have died,” said the Count of Ehrenstein, with a cloudy brow; “we shall be troubled to know what to do with him.”

“Nay, if he would not be killed, we cannot help it,” cried Count Frederick; “though he seems a venomous snake indeed.—Ah! here comes his worthy comrade, Herr Fritz!—Can-

not he stand? He seems badly hurt.—Well, noble sir, I shall not trouble you with many questions. You, it seems, led the party who plundered our Italian merchants; whence got you tidings of their coming?"

"From one of your own people, Count," replied the wounded man. "I know not his name; but the Baron can tell you."

"Where is the Baron?" demanded the Count of Ehrenstein. "I will go and ask him."

"Nay, he is caged,—he is caged," answered Count Frederick. "We shall have time enough to question him hereafter."

His noble companion did not seem very well satisfied with his answer, but bent his eyes moodily on the ground; while the man Fritz took up the conversation, in a sullen tone, saying, "I hope you will not question me farther, my lord the Count; for I am faint from loss of blood, and it is high time that you should either have me tended, or end me at once."

“ Nay, Heaven forfend, Herr Fritz !” exclaimed Count Frederick ; “ we shall want you hereafter, since you say it was one of my men who helped you to your rich booty. Take him away, and try and stanch the bleeding of his wounds. Give him some wine, if they have not drunk it all ; and then bring me water, that I may wash my hands. Nay, why so grave, my noble fellow-soldier ?” he continued, turning to the Count of Ehrenstein ; “ but it is true you have lived long in peace, and are not so much accustomed as myself to see scenes of slaughter and destruction ; and yet we must leave no part of the work here undone. I will not quit Eppenfeld while there is one beam of timber spanning from wall to wall. Nevertheless, it is not needful that you should stay.”

“ Oh, I will bear you company,” said he of Ehrenstein. “ It is true I love not to see such things, yet still — ”

“ Nay, but it is needless,” interrupted Count Frederick. “ You shall guard the prisoners and the treasure back to Ehrenstein ; while I

will remain and see the nest of plunderers destroyed."

"And the Baron?" asked his friend, with a hesitating look.

"He goes with you, of course," replied Count Frederick; "only keep him safe, for he is a wily fox."

"Oh, that I will," replied the other, with a countenance which suddenly brightened; "yet if I could aid you here, I am quite willing to stay."

"No need, — no need," answered Count Frederick. "I have men and means enough."

"Well, then, I will go and prepare for departure," said the Count of Ehrenstein, "and will give you a victor's banquet when you arrive."

Thus saying, he moved towards the door; and as he quitted the hall, Count Frederick of Leiningen gave a meaning glance, half sad, half sarcastic, first to the jester, and then to the old knight.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE whole castle of Ehrenstein was still as the grave. There are times when distant murmurs of busy life, when the hum of insects in the air, when the scarce heard voice of the distant nightingale, when the whisper of a passing breeze, that speaks as if but to make the stillness felt, seem to increase the sensation of the silence. But there is a deeper, deader silence than that, when all is so profoundly tranquil that it seems as if no sound would ever wake again, when death itself seems powerful over all; and the absence of all activity makes us feel as if our own being was the only living principle left existent upon earth. But it brings with it no idea of annihilation. It seems but the utter exclusion of all

mortal things, as if the animation of clay were over, and the noiseless reign of spirit were begun. The soul, no longer jostled by the life of flesh, seems to walk forth at large, and to have freer communication with things as immaterial as itself. The essence within us feels as if a thick and misty veil were withdrawn, and things unseen in the dull glare of the animal day were apparent to the kindred spirit in the hour of temporary death. But this is only felt when entire silence pervades all things; when there is no voice of bird or insect, no whispered breeze, no distant sound of those that watch at night; when all is still, and, to the ignorance of individual being, it seems that the one who feels is the only one who lives. Then is the hour of expectation; for if, according to the old philosophy, nature abhors a vacuum, the void she most abhors is the absence of all action. The heart of every living thing is ever asking, "What next?" and the deepest conviction implanted in the mind of man is, that want of activity is extinction.

Even sleep itself has its sensation and its dream ; and to him who wakes while all the rest are buried in forgetfulness, there is a constant looking for something assimilating in solemnity with the hour, and the darkness, and the silence, to break the unnatural lack of busy life that seems around. Oh ! how fancy then wanders through the wide unoccupied extent, and seeks for something active like itself, and, debarred all communion with beings of earth, ventures into the unsubstantial world, and perchance finds a responding voice to answer her cry for companionship.

It would seem that there is almost a contradiction in terms under the philosophy that admits the existence of a world of spirits, and yet denies that there can be any means of communication between that world and the spirits still clothed in flesh ; but, even in the most sceptical, there are misdoubtings of their own unbelief ; and to every one who thinks, there come moments when there arise such questions as these : Where lies the barrier

between us and those above us—between us and those who have gone before? Can we speak across the gulf? Is it bridged over by any path? Is there a gulf indeed?—or, in this instance, as in all others through the universal scheme, is the partition but thin and incomplete that separates us from the order next above?

Such are at least questions with all but the most purely worldly even in a most purely worldly age; but, in the times I write of, doubts on such subjects were precluded by faith and by tradition. Activity, indeed, and thought, occupied continually by matters the least spiritual, banished reflections upon such subjects during the great part of each man's time. But reflection was needless where conviction was ever present; and if speculation indulged itself in times of solitude and silence, it was only in regard to what our relations could be with the immaterial world, not whether there were any relations at all.

Everything was still and motionless as the grave when Ferdinand descended slowly from

his chamber in the castle of Ehrenstein, and entered the broad corridor which stretched across the great mass of the building. It was very dark, for no moon was up ; and, though the stars were bright and many in the sky, the light they afforded through the dim casements was but small. The night was still, too ; for no wind moved the trees ; not a cloud crossed the sky ; and, as it was colder than it had been, the insects ceased for a time from their activity, too early begun, and the song of the minstrel of the night was not heard. Every one in the castle itself seemed sound asleep ; no doors creaked on the hinges, no voice of guest or serving-man was heard from below, the very sentinel was keeping guard still and silently, like the starry watchers in the sky overhead.

Ferdinand's heart beat quick, but it was not with the thought of all the strange and fearful sights he had seen in the place which he was now about to revisit—though he did think of them ; it was not with that vague mysterious

awe inspired by any near approach in mind to things beyond this world of warm and sunny life. He was going, for the first time, at night and in darkness, to the chamber of her he loved, to guide her through strange scenes, alone and unwatched for many an hour to come, upon an errand of which he knew nothing but that it was promised a happy end ; and his whole frame thrilled with the emotions so sweet, so joyful, that are only known to early, pure, and ardent love.

With the unlighted lamp in his hand, he approached the door, and quietly raised the latch. All was silent in the little anteroom, but there was a light burning there, and Bertha sitting sleeping soundly in a chair, with some woman's work fallen at her feet. Ferdinand did not wake her ; for Adelaide had told him to come when it was needful, even to her own chamber ; and, approaching the door of that room, he opened it quietly, and went in. Adelaide slept not, for in her heart, too, were busy emotions that defy slumber. As

she saw him, she sprang to meet him, with all the joy and confidence of love ; but yet it was with a glow in her cheek, and a slight agitated trembling of her limbs, which she could not overcome, though she knew not why she shook, for she had no fears—she no longer had any doubts of her own acts.

“ I am ready, Ferdinand,” she whispered, after one dear caress ; “ let us go at once—nay, love, let us go.”

He led her silently into the next room, where the lover lighted his lamp ; and the lady gently woke her sleeping maid, and whispered her to watch for their return. Then onward through the corridor they went, and down the stairs, till they reached the door of the great hall.

“ Hark !” whispered Adelaide, “ did you not hear a sound ?”

“ We may hear many, dear one,” answered the young gentleman in the same tone ; “ aye, and we may see strange and fearful sights too, but we will not let them daunt us, my beloved.

I have trod these paths before, and they are familiar to me; but to you, love, they are new, and may be frightful. Look not around, then, dear girl; rest on my arm, keep your eyes on the ground, and give ear to no sound. I will guide you safely."

Thus saying, he opened the hall door carefully, and, with some feeling of relief, saw that all within was dark and silent. Closing it as soon as they had passed the threshold, he gazed around, but nothing was to be seen but the drooping branches with which they had ornamented the walls, hanging sickly and languid in the first process of decay, and the flowers with which they had chapleted the columns already withered and pale. Such are the ambitions and the joys of youth, and thus they pass away.

"It is quiet, dear Adelaide," whispered Ferdinand. "May our whole way be equally so. All evil spirits surely will keep aloof from an angel's presence."

"Hush!" she said; "I fear not, Ferdinand,

for I feel as if I were engaged in a high duty, and till it is accomplished I am eager to go on. I can walk quicker now."

He led her on at a more rapid pace, unlocked the smaller door at the other end of the hall, and, keeping her arm in his, entered the dark and gloomy passage. Adelaide, notwithstanding his caution, looked up and said, "It is a foul and sad-looking place, indeed;" but she neither paused nor slackened her steps, and in a few moments more they stood at the mouth of the well stairs.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, dearest," said Ferdinand; "and take heed to every step; for all are damp and slippery, and many of the stones decayed. Lean firmly upon me as I go down before you."

She did as he told her; but as they descended amidst mould and slimy damp, and heavy air, the whispering voices he had heard again sounded on the ear, and Adelaide's heart beat, though she resisted terror to the utmost. "Fear not, dear girl — fear not," he said;

“we shall soon be in the free air of the wood.”

She made no reply, but followed quickly, and at length they reached the door below. As he pushed it open, a voice seemed to say, “They come—they come. Hush, hush !” and he led her on into the serfs’ burial-place.

“There is a light,” whispered Adelaide. “Good heavens ! there must be some one here.”

“No one that will slay us,” answered her lover. “It will soon be past, dear girl.” As he spoke, however, he raised his eyes, and saw a faint light gleaming from the heavy column to which the skeleton was chained ; and as undaunted he advanced, he saw written on the green stone, as if in characters of flame, the word, “Vengeance !” and as he gazed, low voices repeated, “Vengeance—vengeance !”

He felt his fair companion tremble terribly ; but now she bent down her eyes, as he had bidden her, for she feared that her courage would give way. The next instant, however, she started and paused, for she had well nigh

put her foot upon a skull, the grinning white teeth of which, and rayless eye-holes, were raised towards her. “Ah, Ferdinand!” she exclaimed; but he hurried her past, and on towards the crypt of the chapel.

“Stay, stay,” said Adelaide, as they passed through the low arch which led thither. “This is very terrible; I feel faint.”

“Yet a few steps farther,” answered Ferdinand; “the free air will soon revive you, and we shall be there in a moment.”

As he spoke, there came suddenly, from the lower chapel vaults before them, a slow and solemn chant, as if several deep voices were singing a dirge, and Ferdinand and Adelaide paused and listened while they sang:—

#### DIRGE.

Peace to the dead! They rest  
Calm in the silent bed.  
They have tasted joy and sorrow;  
They have lived and grieved,  
Have loved and been blest;  
Nor thought of this dark to-morrow.  
Peace to the happy dead!

Peace to the dead ! No more  
On them shall earth's changes shed  
The blight of all joy and pleasure.  
Their life is above,  
In the haven of love,  
And their heart is with its treasure.  
Peace to the happy dead !

Though it was a sad and solemn air, and though the distinct words were of as serious a character as the lips of man can pronounce, yet they seemed rather to revive than to depress the spirits of Adelaide; and as the music ceased, and the falling sounds died away in the long aisles, she said,

“ I can go on now, Ferdinand. It is true there is something else to live for than the life of this earth ! and the very feeling that it is so, and the keeping of that always before one's mind, seem not only to hallow but to brighten the loves and joys of this being, when we remember that if they are what they ought to be, they may be protracted into eternity. I have been weak and cowardly, more than I thought

to be; but I will be so no more. The thought of death makes me brave."

Ferdinand was silent, for he felt that his love, if not more mortal, was at least more human than hers; but he led her on, and now she gazed around her by the light of the lamp, marking the coffins that were piled up, and the monuments that were mingled with them,—now and then commenting, by a word or two, as the faint rays fell first upon one and then upon another, till at length they reached the door which gave them exit into the forest, where the free air seemed to revive her fully.

"Thank God!" she said, when they once more stood upon the side of the hill. "How delightful it is to feel the wind upon one's cheek! After all, this earth is full of pleasant things; and though the contemplation of death and its presence may be salutary, yet they are heavy upon the heart from their very solemnity. How shall we ever get down this steep part of the rock?"

"Stay," said Ferdinand, who had been shad-

ing the light with his cloak ; “ I will put the lamp within the door, and leave it burning ; we shall need it when we return. The way is not so steep as it seems, dearest, and I will help and guide you.”

After securing the light, the young man returned to her side, as she stood upon the little jutting pinnacle of crag, and aided her down the descent ; nor was the task aught but a very sweet one, for still her hand rested in his, and often, perhaps without much need, his arm glided round her waist to support her as she descended, and words of love that they could now speak, fearless of overhearing ears, were uttered at every pause upon their way. A gayer and a happier spirit, too, seemed to come upon the fair girl after they had left the crypt ; sometimes, indeed, strangely mingled with a tone of sadness, but still full of hope and tenderness. She even somewhat jested with her lover on his passion, and asked in playful words, if he was sure, very sure, of his own heart ?—if their situations were altogether

changed by some of the strange turns of fate, and she but a poor dowerless maiden, without station or great name, and he a prince of high degree, whether his love would be the same?—whether he would still seek her for his bride as ardently as then?

I need not, surely, tell how Ferdinand answered her;—I need not say what professions he made,—or how he once revenged himself for her assumed doubts of a passion as true as her own. She made him promise a thousand things too—things that to him seemed strange and wild: that he would never willingly do aught that might break her heart,—that, if ever they were married, he would for one month—for one short, sweet month—do everything that she required. She made him promise—nay, she made him vow it; and he was inclined to engage largely for such sweet hopes as she held out; so that had a universe been at his command, and all the splendours of destiny within his reach, he would have given all, and more, for the bright vision that her

words called up ; and yet he somewhat laughed at her exactions, and gave his promise as playfully as she seemed to speak. But she would have it seriously, she said, and made him vow it over and over again.

Thus went they on, descending the hill, and spending more time by the way, in truth, than was altogether needful, till they came within sight of the little chapel in the wood ; and there a new mood seemed to come over Ferdinand's fair companion. She stopped suddenly, and gazing, by the faint light of the stars, upon the countenance which memory served to show her more than her eyes, she asked, " And do you really love me, Ferdinand ? and will you ever love me as now ? "

" I do—I will for ever, Adelaide," he answered, drawing her nearer to him,—" ever, ever ! "

But she, of her own accord, cast her arms around his neck, and leaning her head upon his shoulder, seemed to him to weep. He pressed her to his heart, he whispered all those words

that he thought might soothe and reassure her, but still she remained the same, till the door of the chapel, which was about a hundred yards before them, opened, and by the light which streamed out, Ferdinand saw the form of Father George, looking forth as if anxious for their coming.

“He is looking for us, dearest,” he said; “let us go on.”

“I am ready—I am ready,” replied Adelaide; and, wiping away what were certainly drops from her eyes, she followed at once.

## CHAPTER VII.

“I HAVE been anxious for you, my children,” said Father George, as they entered his little chamber by the side of the chapel. “What, weeping, Adelaide! Are you not happy? Have you a doubt?”

“None, none,” she answered, holding out her hand to Ferdinand. “I know not why you sent for us, Father, but I am sure that whatever you counsel is right, and I feel that my fate is linked to his, as my heart is to his heart, and his to mine, I do believe; but there are other tears than sad ones, good Father, and though mine are not sad, they might well be so, considering all the objects on the path hither.”

“ Say, solemn, rather, my child,” answered Father George ; “ but for the rest : if you can love and do love, as I believe, there is happiness before you. Are you prepared, Adelaide, to bind yourself to him you love by bonds that cannot be broken ? ”

She looked down, and the blood mounting into her cheek, then left it as pale as alabaster ; but her lips moved, and in a lone tone, she said, “ I am.”

“ And you, Ferdinand,” continued the priest, “ are you prepared, at all risks, to wed this fair lady—not with the vehement and ardent fire of youth, though that I know you feel, but with the steadfast purpose and desire to make her reasonable happiness your great end and object of existence ; to seek it by all means, and at all times ; to do her right in every word, and thought, and deed ; to be to her what God intended man to be to woman, her support and strength, her protection and her comfort, more than a friend, more than a brother, more than a lover—one with herself

in every good wish and purpose? Answer me thoughtfully, my son, for I take a great responsibility upon me. I counsel her to give her hand to you against every worldly custom and all human policy; and if you ever make her regret that deed, the sorrow and the shame will rest on me."

"I am ready, Father," answered Ferdinand, "to take her hand as the best gift that Heaven could give me, on the conditions and in the terms you say. We are not like many others, Father, we have known each other from youth's early days, when childhood has no concealments, and the heart is without disguise. Deep affection and sincere regard have ripened, on my part at least, into love that never can change, for one whose heart I know too well to doubt that it can alter either. Whatever dangers may beset our way—and I see many—there will be none from changed affection.—But I beseech you play not with my hopes. I know not much of such things, it is true, but I have heard that there are difficulties often

insuperable in the way of those who, at our age and in our circumstances, would unite their fate together."

"There are, my son," answered Father George; "but in your case I have removed them. Here, under my hand," he continued, laying it as he spoke upon a roll of parchment on the table, "I have a dispensation from our Holy Father, the Pope, for your immediate marriage; and for weighty reasons which I have stated to him by the mouth of his Legate, he gives me full authority and power to celebrate it whenever occasion shall serve. No moment could be more favourable than the present—no moment when it is more needful. Dangers, my son, there may be; but they are not such as you anticipate; and watchful eyes are upon you to ward off anything that may menace; but fail not either of you, if you see the slightest cause for alarm, to give me warning by some means; and now, my children, come with me; for the night wears, and you must not be long absent."

Ferdinand took Adelaide's hand in his, and followed the priest into the chapel, by the small door, in the side of his little room, which led almost direct to the altar. He gazed at her fondly as he went, and joy, the deepest he had ever felt in life, was certainly in his heart; but there was something in the hour and the circumstances which softened and solemnized without decreasing that joy. Adelaide turned but one momentary glance on him, and it was almost sad, yet full of love. There was anxiety in it—ay, and fear over and above the timid emotion with which woman must always take that step which decides her fate for happiness or unhappiness through life. She seemed less surprised indeed at all that had taken place with the good priest than her lover. The object for which Father George had sent for them did not appear so unexpected to her as it did to him. It seemed as if she had had a presentiment or a knowledge of what was to come; and Ferdinand now understood the agitation which she had displayed just before

they entered Father George's cell. She went on, however, without hesitation—ay, and without reluctance, and in a moment after they stood together before the altar. The candles thereon were already lighted, and a small gold ring lay upon the book. All seemed prepared before hand, but ere Father George com- meneed the ceremony, he bade Ferdinand un- lock the chapel door and leave it ajar. As soon as the lover had returned to Adelaide's side, the words which were to bind them to- gether for weal or woe, through life, began. She answered firmly, though in a low tone; and when the ring was at length on her finger, Ferdinand heard, or thought he heard, a voice without murmur, “It is done!”

The fair girl marked it not; but, as if over- come by all the emotions of that hour, stretched out her arms to her young husband, and leaned upon his breast. She wept not, but she hid her eyes, saying in an earnest but trembling tone, “Oh, dear Ferdinand, re- member, remember all you have promised.”

“I will, love, I will,” he answered. “You are my own, sweet bride; and I will ever cherish you as the better part of my own life. Shall I now lead her back, Father?”

“Nay,” said the priest, “there is more yet to be done. The church’s part is over, and the bond irrevocable; but yet the laws of the land require something more, and every form must be fulfilled. But all is prepared. Come with me once more, and sign the contract. Then, after a moment’s rest, you may go back—Yes,” he added, after some thought and apparent hesitation, “you had better go back for this night at least. But I will not trust you to stay there long. You are both too young, too inexperienced, and too fond, to conceal from the eyes of others the bond that is between you. Keep yourselves ready, however, and I will arrange the means for your flight, and a safe asylum.”

“Could we not go at once,” asked Ferdinand, as they followed to the priest’s chamber, “to the house of good Franz Creussen? He

seems to know much of my fate, and to love me well."

"Not to-night, not to-night," answered Father George; "you forget who may be met on the way thither. Nay, return for this night, and be cautious where you are. Ere to-morrow you shall hear more; but in the mean time, in case of need, no arm will be found stronger to aid, no heart more ready to serve you, than that of good Franz Creussen. You may trust to him in any case, for he does love you well, and has proved his love to you and yours, ere now." The contract was signed; and, when all was complete, the priest opened the door, saying, "Keep the key I have given you carefully, Ferdinand, it may serve you in many ways; but to-morrow you shall either see or hear from me. And now, farewell, my children, God's benison and the holy church's be upon you!"

With this blessing they departed; and Ade-laide and Ferdinand returned to the castle more slowly even than they had come thence.

It often happens in life that one emotion drowns another; and although they could not but know that there were dangers of many kinds before them, and though the gloomy scenes which they had so lately passed through still lay on their road back, yet the rapturous joy of the moment, the knowledge that they were united beyond the power of fate, as they thought, to sever them, swallowed up apprehension and awe, and left nought but one of those wild visions of happiness which occasionally break upon the night of life.

As on the occasion of Ferdinand's former visit, neither sights nor sounds that could create alarm awaited them on their return. The untrimmed lamp stood burning faintly where they had left it, and passing quickly through the vaults, they soon reached the hall above. There they lingered for some time, and then extinguishing the light, found their way through the other passages, and up the stairs; but the grey eye of morning was faintly opening on the world when the young husband

returned to his own chamber. Casting himself on his bed, he strove to sleep ; but for nearly an hour the wild emotions of his heart kept him waking, and then for a short time he slept with heavy and profound slumber. What it was that woke him he knew not, but he raised himself with a sudden start, and looked round as if some one had called. He saw that the sun had climbed higher than he had imagined, and rising, he dressed himself hastily, but with care, then gazed for a single instant in sweet thought out of the window, and breaking off his reverie, suddenly turned to the door. He fancied he must be still dreaming when he found that it would not yield to his hand. He shook it vehemently, but it did not give way. He strove to burst it open, but it resisted all his efforts.

“ This is strange, indeed ! ” he said to himself, with his thoughts all whirling and confused, in agitation, anger, and apprehension ; for where there is aught to be concealed, fear has always some share in the sensations which

any event unaccounted for produces. After a moment's thought, however, he calmed himself, and walking to the casement, looked down upon the wall below. The height was considerable, and no sentinel was underneath at the moment; but the measured tread of a heavy foot was heard round the angle of the tower; and the young gentleman waited calmly till the man paced round, and came under the spot where he stood. "Ho! Rudolph," he said, "some one, in sport, I suppose, has locked my door; go in and bid them open it."

The man obeyed, but returned in a minute or two after with another, who looked up to the window, saying, as soon as he saw the young gentleman's face, "It is that young fellow, Martin of Dillberg, sir, who has locked it; and he will not give up the key, declaring he has a charge to make against you when our lord returns, and that he will keep you there till he does."

Ferdinand's heart beat a good deal with

very mixed sensations, but he answered instantly,—“Who commands in this castle when the Count and his knights are away?”

“Why you, sir, certainly,” answered Rudolph; “but I can’t see how we can help you, as the lock is on your side of the door, and we dare not venture to lay hands on Count Frederick’s man. Can you not contrive to push back the bolt with your dagger?”

“I have tried while you were away,” answered Ferdinand. “Hie you to the stable, Rudolph, bring me one of the strong ropes you will find there, fix it on the end of your lance, and stretch the end up to me. I will soon teach this Martin of Dillberg who has the gravest charge to make against the other.”

The two men hastened to obey; and Ferdinand remained at the casement, anxiously looking for their return. Ere they appeared, however, he heard their voices speaking apparently to another person; and one of the soldiers exclaimed aloud,—“Get you gone, sir! You have no command here. If you attempt

to take hold of it I will break your pate ; and if Master Ferdinand, when he gets out, bids us shut you up for your pains, we will do it."

" Rudolph ! Herman !" shouted Ferdinand from the window, " make sure of his person. He is a traitor and a knave ! "

The men did not hear him, but came on, carrying between them a heavy coil of rope, the end of which was speedily stretched out upon the point of the lance, to such a height that he could reach it. Then fastening it rapidly to the iron bar which separated the casement into two, Ferdinand took the rope between his hands and feet, and slid down upon the platform.

" Now follow me, quick," he cried. " Where is this treacherous hound ? By Heaven ! I have a mind to cleave his skull for him."

" He was just now at the steps going down to the court," replied the man Herman ; " but you had better not use him roughly, sir. Shut him up till our lord returns."

“Come on then, come on,” cried Ferdinand, still hurrying forward; “we shall lose our hold of him. He dare not stay and face me.”

It was as he thought, for by the time he reached the court, Martin of Dillberg was mounted and passing the drawbridge. A sneering smile of triumph and malice curled his lip as Ferdinand advanced under the arch, and turning his horse for an instant, he exclaimed, “I go to give news of you to your friends, good sir. Pray where were you at midnight? You, my good men, if you will follow my advice, will keep that youth within the castle walls, for he is a traitor to his lord and yours, as I will prove upon him at my return.”

Thus saying, he wheeled his horse and spurred away; and Ferdinand, with as light a look as he could assume, turned back into the castle. The two men paused for a minute to converse together, and Ferdinand, hurrying on, passed twice through the corridor with a heavy step, in the hope that Bertha might hear him and come forth. She did not

appear, however, and then going out to the battlements, he passed by the window where she usually sat and worked. She was there, and alone, and making a sign towards the corridor, he returned thither without delay. In a few minutes the gay girl joined him, but she instantly saw from his look that something had gone amiss, and her warm cheek turned somewhat pale in anticipation of his tidings.

“Hie you to Father George with all speed, Bertha,” said Ferdinand; “tell him that I fear that young hound, Martin of Dillberg, has tracked me and your lady to the chapel last night, or else saw me come forth from her chamber. Bid him hasten to help us, or we are lost, for the young villain is gone to bear the news to the Count. Hark!—there are trumpets!” and springing to the window, he looked out.

“The Count, upon my life!” he exclaimed.  
“Away, Bertha, away!”

“But I shall meet them!” exclaimed the

girl, wildly ; “and I shake so, I am ready to drop.”

“Here, take this key,” cried Ferdinand ; “it opens the small door out of the great hall ; then straight on along the passage, down the well stairs, and through the vaults—straight as you can go. You cannot miss your way. If you would save me, your lady, and yourself, you must shake off all idle terrors. You have now full daylight, and it streams into the vaults as clear as it does here. Leave the door unloeked behind you.”

“I will go,” said Bertha, “if all the ghosts in the church-yard were there. But I must first warn my lady ;” and away she sped.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WITH blast of trumpet, and an air of triumph, the small force of the Count of Ehrenstein marched up towards the gates of the castle. Each individual soldier, long deprived of the means of winning any renown in those “piping times of peace,” felt an individual pride in having fought and conquered; though, to say sooth, the two knights, and older warriors were not very well contented that so small and inglorious a part of the short siege of Eppenfeld had fallen to their share. The youths might boast, they thought, and plume themselves upon so poor an exploit, and some little honour might attach to those who had taken a share in the first

operations ; but the days had been when the men of Ehrenstein would not have remained inactive, watching to catch the runaways, while the retainers of a friendly prince assailed the castle itself, and underwent all the danger and fatigue of the assault. The Count was brave and politic, they admitted, and policy has always something in it which commands a sort of mysterious respect. We admire what is successful, though we do not understand the principles upon which success has been achieved ; but yet, until discipline has reached a high pitch, we do not conceive that there can be as much glory in performing well a passive part, as in taking a share in operations where peril and energetic action are the means of victory. Thus many of the best soldiers in the Count's band were somewhat discontented, and inclined to grumble, while he himself rode on in silence, communicating to no one his feelings in regard to the result of their undertaking, or to the plan upon which the enterprise had been conducted. He had prisoners and trea-

sure with him ; and that, old Sickendorf thought, would be enough to satisfy the Count ; but the good ritter himself was dissatisfied that he had not an opportunity of striking a strong stroke, and longed for a more energetic and less politic leader, although he owned that but little was to be done in those days of art and negotiation, compared with the times when he himself was young, and the sword decided all.

Very different is the operation of every passion upon the individual on whom it acts. As the relative forces of agent and object always modify the effect of every cause, the character of the person who feels changes entirely the result of the emotions which act upon him. Some men are elated by success ; some almost depressed in spirit. With some men the heart seems to expand under the sunshine of fair fortune, with some to contract ; as particular flowers open in the shade, while others spread their breasts abroad to the bright day. The Count of Ehrenstein was one on whom the light seemed to have no enlarging

influence; and while his men, especially the younger, laughed and talked, he rode on from Eppenfeld towards his own stronghold, in gloomy silence and deep thought. Hardly one word proffered he to any one by the way, and ever and anon he looked back to the body of prisoners with the Baron at their head, who followed, strongly guarded, in the rear of his troop. Then, and only then, what may be called a feeble look came over his countenance —a look of doubt and hesitation, as if he were trying some question with his own heart, which he found it difficult to solve.

At a short distance from the castle he was met by Martin of Dillberg, who stopped and spoke to him for a few minutes in a low voice. Those who were near saw an expression of sudden anger spread over the face of their lord; his pale cheek flushed, his brow grew black as night, his hands grasped the reins tight, and he replied in quick and hurried tones. But after time the young man rode on towards Eppenfeld, and the troop, which had halted, recom-

menced its march. The fierce look of the Count, however, speedily passed away; he turned his eyes again to the Baron, and once more fell into gloomy thought.

At the end of about half an hour, the cavalcade approached the gates of Ehrenstein, and the Count passed over the drawbridge, and under the arch of the gateway, where Ferdinand of Altenburg stood, with some of the soldiery, to receive him. If, as I have said, the operations of passions are very different upon different individuals, the fact was never more strikingly displayed than in the case of Ferdinand. He knew that a moment of great peril had arrived, he felt that the purchase of a few hours of joy might now have to be paid in his blood; he feared also for her he loved more than for himself; but the emotions of such a situation called forth in his mind powers of which he had been ignorant: and although at first he had been agitated and almost bewildered, he now stood calm and collected, marking well the heavy frown upon the Count's brow, and a

look of sudden fierceness that came into his face when their eyes first met, but prepared for whatever might follow and ready to endure it firmly.

The Count of Ehrenstein dismounted slowly, and, without addressing a word to his young follower, called Sickendorf and Mosbach to him, giving them directions for lodging the prisoners securely, and especially for placing the Baron of Eppenfeld in a chamber apart, in one of the high towers. He then spoke a word or two in a low tone to Carl Von Mosbach, which seemed somewhat to surprise him; but the Count repeated aloud and emphatically, "Not for one moment! You will soon know the reason." Then turning to Ferdinand he said, "Has all gone quietly in the castle?"

"No, my good lord," replied the young gentleman, boldly. "That youth, Martin of Dillberg, who came hither with Count Frederick, dared to lock me in my chamber, and has since fled on horseback. I should have pursued him and brought him back, but I had no horses saddled."

“He will come back very soon,” said the Count, in a marked tone.

“I doubt it, my good lord,” answered Ferdinand; “he knows that I have a charge to bring against him which may cost his life; and which, if I had been permitted to join you before Eppenfeld, I should have made ere now.”

“Indeed,” said the Count musing; “it may be so.”

“Nay, noble sir, it is,” replied the young gentleman, thinking the Count’s words were an answer to what he had said, rather than to what was passing in his own mind; “I am ready to state the whole now, if you have time; for as I see the Baron of Eppenfeld is a prisoner in your hands, you have the means of testing the truth at once.”

“Not now,” rejoined the Count; “not now, —I have other matters to think of. I will hear you in an hour.”

As he spoke, the Baron was led past, and the Lord of Ehrenstein immediately followed. Ferdinand remained musing in the court, not

daring to seek any means of communicating with his young bride, and doubtful what course to follow.

As he thus stood, Sickendorf came up, and drawing him aside, demanded, “What is this, Ferdinand? Mosbach tells me he has orders not to suffer you to pass the gates, or to take a step beyond the walls, the little hall, or the tower in which you sleep. What have you been doing, you graceless young dog? Is your affair with Bertha come to light?”

Ferdinand saw that his apprehensions were but too just, but he replied calmly, “I know not what our lord suspects, Sickendorf: he mentioned no charge against me to myself; but doubtless, whatever it is, it springs from the malice of Martin of Dillberg, who is right well aware that when this affair of the plunder of the Italian merchants is inquired into, his treason to his lord will be apparent.”

“Ay, ay; is it so?” cried Sickendorf. “I saw him stop the Count and speak with him just now. What! I suppose he has been deal-

ing with the Baron, and was to have shared the booty?"

"Something like it, I believe," answered Ferdinand; "but as the Baron is here, he can prove the truth of what he told me."

"So then the tale came from him," said Sickendorf; "I fear it is not to be trusted."

"It was spoken in the presence of many of his people and of some of ours," answered Ferdinand. "However, it is my duty to repeat what he told me; and if he has not had some communication with Martin of Dillberg, I see not how his tongue could be so glib with his name, as the youth has but lately returned with Count Frederick from the East."

"Right, right," answered Sickendorf; "thou art as shrewd as a blood-hound, Ferdinand. Doubtless the lad is afraid of thy tale, and has brought some charge against thee to cover his own treachery."

"It may be so,—it may not," answered Ferdinand. "However, Mosbach must obey our lord's behest, so I will even take myself to the

battlements, which are within the limits you have mentioned."

Thus saying, he turned away, and walked up to the wall, gazing anxiously towards Father George's cell, yet taking care to pace up and down with as unconcerned an air as possible, that no eye watching him from the main building or its manifold towers might see the anxious expectation of his heart, or judge in what direction his thoughts turned. It were vain to deny that he revolved, with eager rapid emotions, all the circumstances of his fate, and strove to discover some cause of hope; some clue to escape from the dangers that menaced him on every side. At one time it seemed impossible that anything but the most fatal result could ensue. He knew the Connt too well to think that he would be merciful—he knew the customs, if not the laws, of the land too well, not to feel certain that his death would be deemed only a reasonable atonement for the deed he had ventured to do. But then, again, he asked himself, would the good priest who had been as

a father to him from his infancy, sanction, counsel, aid him in an enterprise so perilous to all concerned in it, unless he had the most positive assurance that he could guide the course he had pointed out to a happy termination, and shield those from peril who, in following the dictates of their own inclination, had also followed his advice and exhortation. But still apprehension predominated ; and though, at each turn he took, his eyes were directed to the little chapel in the wood, his hopes were destined to be disappointed. The door of the priest's cell he could not see, but he caught several glimpses of the road, and the second time he reached the point where he had the best view, he saw a female figure—which he instantly concluded to be that of Bertha—approach the chapel, and disappear behind the angle of the building. It scarcely was obscured a moment ere it reappeared again, and then was lost in the wood, “She has not found him,” said Ferdinand to himself; “he is absent—was ever anything so unfortunate ?” and he turned again upon the battlements lost in thought.

In the mean while, the Count of Ehrenstein had followed close upon the steps of those who led the Baron of Eppenfeld to the place of his imprisonment; and the door was not yet fully bolted and barred when he caused it to be opened again, and entered, directing the three soldiers who had conveyed the captive thither to wait at the foot of the stairs till he came out. Then, closing the door behind him, he confronted the prisoner with a stern brow, and teeth close shut. The Baron gave him back look for look; and a smile, slight but sarcastic, curled his lip.

“Well, Baron of Eppenfeld,” said the Count; and then paused.

“Well, Count of Ehrenstein,” replied the Baron; and he also stopped in the midst, for the other to go on.

“You sent me a message, last night,” said the Count; “and you were fool enough, in your drunken sleepiness, not to take advantage of the opportunity given you, and to suffer the hot-headed Count of Leiningen to blow your

gates open, when you might have escaped two hours before."

"Very unlucky for you, Count," replied the Baron of Eppenfeld, in a tone of provoking coolness. "You should have sent me some answer to my message, and then I should have known how to act."

"I could not; I had no time; I had no opportunity," answered the Count of Ehrenstein. "All I could do, after I received that message, was to withdraw my men to the east, and leave you room to escape with all your treasure."

"But why answered you not the first," asked the Baron; "the message that I sent you by young Ferdinand of Altenburg?—I thought better of it after a time, it is true, and judged that a short repose in Eppenfeld would do him good; but when he got out, he must have told you what I said, which was just the same thing; and instead of a friendly reply or friendly comment, your first act was to march against me."

"And you told Ferdinand of Altenburg?" said the Count, with a moody look. "Pray, what was it you told him?"

"The same, as near as may be," answered the Baron, "that I told the other."

"The other is dead," replied the Count; "and Ferdinand of Altenburg is in peril. You shall judge, by the way in which I treat him, how I deal with those who possess perilous secrets."

Thus saying, he opened the door, called one of the soldiers from the bottom of the stairs, and, when he reached the room, bade him hasten to Karl Von Mosbach, and direct him to arrest Ferdinand of Altenburg, and place him in confinement in the dark cell below the lesser hall. "Now, Baron," he said, as soon as the man was gone, "what think you, now?"

"That you are a hard-hearted villain," answered the Baron, "and ten times worse than myself, bad as men call me. The youth served you well and boldly; he risked his life, I can

tell you, to do your bidding, and this is the way you repay him. But I don't believe it; you will not injure him for any words he has heard from me."

"If I live till noon to-morrow," answered the Count, in a cold, deliberate tone, "he shall lose his head by the axe, upon those battlements."

"Then, there will be rare chopping," answered the Baron, with a laugh; "for eight or nine of your men heard the message I sent —the words were addressed to him, but they were spoken in the hearing of many."

"This is no jesting matter, Baron," said the Count; "let me tell you that your own life or death is the question. I shall give this youth time to prepare, for he is my own sworn follower, and no one can see or tamper with him. But your case is different; and all the time I can allow you is one hour, for the questions between us must be despatched before the return of those who are now destroying the wolf's den."

Even this stern announcement seemed to have but a small effect upon the captive. "All which that shows," he answered, with a shrug of the shoulders, "is, that you take little time to deliberate upon murdering a prisoner. You cannot frighten me, Count of Ehrenstein! I have confronted death many a time a month, during twenty years or more; and if in all this talking you have some object in view, you had better speak it plainly at once, and not strive to reach it by threats."

"Should I not be a fool to trust you living," asked the Count, "when you can use such threats to me?"

"Oli, dear! no," answered his prisoner; "whatever I have done, I have never broken an oath in my life; and I am quite ready to relieve you from all fears, upon certain conditions."

"Ha!" said the Count, "what may they be?"

"First, that you will give me the means of escape," answered the Baron.

“At the present moment that is impossible,” replied the Count; “but to-night it may be done. What more?”

“Secondly, I must have some small sum of gold to get me together a band in some distant country. If I were to go wandering about here without my stone walls around me, I should soon be caught, and I have no mind to find myself embroiled with the Imperial Court. I will be content with a small amount; and the third condition is, that you deal not harshly with that youth Ferdinand. On my life! I believe he neither knows nor suspects anything from what I said. He seemed not to heed it, as if he thought you to be too honest a man to do aught that was wrong. He paid much more attention to what I said concerning Count Frederick, and Martin of Dillberg—he marked that right well.”

“Ay, and what was that?” asked the Count.

“Why, I told him how that same Martin came to me, and, upon promise of a share of the booty, warned me of the passage of those Italian

merchants. Faith! they came sooner than he expected; for he said, some three weeks hence. But I kept a sharp watch, for fear of accidents, and an unlucky watch it has turned out: for Count Frederick has got all the money, and the castle to boot."

The Count mused for a few moments, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and then replied, "Well, we shall see. Leave the youth to me; I promise that he shall suffer nothing on your account. The money you shall have, and freedom too, if you can give me such a pledge as I can depend upon."

"I can give you nought else than my oath, Sir Count," answered the Baron, stoutly, "You have taken all else from me. The pig has nothing but the pig's skin."

"Well, you shall swear," answered the other; "but yet I would fain have some other bond than air."

"Give me your dagger," said the Baron. "I will swear on the cross thereof."

But the Count of Ehrenstein was too wary

o trust a weapon in the hand of a foc. “No,” he said, “I will have you swear on a holy relic I have in the chapel, and by the mass.—But you can write, I think?”

“I can make something which they tell me is my name,” answered the Baron of Eppenfeld, who, like an eager chapman, grew in impatience to possess the object of his desire, as he who could grant it seemed to hesitate.

“Well then, you shall sign a paper stating that all the aspersions of my name which, in the heat of passion, you uttered to my retainer, Ferdinand of Altenburg, are false and groundless,” said the Count; “that will satisfy me.”

“How shall I know what the paper is?” asked the Baron; but immediately afterwards he added, “Well, well, it matters not. You swear that I shall have my liberty, and I will sign.”

“I swear it,” answered the Count, kissing the cross of his dagger. “Wait, and I will write the paper, which shall be read to you word by word.”

“I must needs wait when I cannot get away,” replied the prisoner; and when the Count had quitted the chamber, he murmured, “Accursed dog! I will be a match for thee still.”

## CHAPTER IX.

THE Count of Ehrenstein retired to his chamber to write, passing the soldiers, whom he had directed to wait at the bottom of the stairs, without speaking to them: he did not signify to them that they might retire; he did not tell them to take food or wine to the captive, though the journey of the morning had been long and fatiguing, and none of the party had broken bread since they marched from Eppenfeld. But the good lord was a keen calculator, and he judged that the men would watch better, the Baron prove more tractable, fasting than well fed. He remained some time alone, writing and destroying what he had written—for he was as difficult to please in his composi-

tion as a young lover in his first letter to his mistress. Now he thought that the terms he used were too plain and condemnatory of the Baron's own conduct for him to sign them readily ; now they were not fully satisfactory to himself ; and he strove so to express himself that the words might imply more than they actually stated in his own favour. At length, however, the work was completed, and calling some one from without, he bade him seek Count Frederick's chaplain, for he was anxious to give the whole proceeding an air of candour and straightforwardness which it did not, in truth, possess.

When the good priest appeared, he said, with an air which, for him who assumed it, was unusually free and unembarrassed, “ I wish you, good father, to carry this paper to the Baron of Eppenfeld, whom you will find confined above, where one of my men will lead you, and to read to him the contents. It seems that to my good follower, Ferdinand of Altenburg, he used foul and calumnious expressions

regarding me ; and that now, being sorry for having done so, he would fain retract them and make amends. I have put down nearly his own words. If he will sign them, well ; if not, do not press him. Pray let him see that I am indifferent to his exculpation or his charges, and hold as little communication with him as possible till my noble friend Count Frederick's return, as I am anxious that aught we may have to say to this notorious culprit should be said by mutual understanding and consent."

The priest took the paper, and promised to observe the directions to the letter ; and, after having given him a conductor to the Baron's prison, the Count paced up and down his chamber in gloomy expectation. It seemed to him that his envoy was long ; he would fain have gone to listen to what passed between him and the captive ; but he did not dare ; and at length he cast himself down upon a seat, and taking a book from the shelf, affected to read. Scarcely had he done so, when the chaplain returned ; and, though the Count's

keen eye fixed upon him with an eager and inquiring glance, it could discover nothing in his countenance but the air of a good honest man who had just transacted a piece of ordinary business.

“There is the paper signed, noble Count,” he said; “the poor man expresses himself an hungered, and asks for meat and drink.”

“Did he make any difficulty as to signing this?” asked the Count; adding, “I hope you pressed him not.”

“There was no need, my son,” answered the priest, “he signed it at once, and seemed wondrous meek considering all we have heard of him. All he complained of was thirst and hunger; and, good sooth, he should have food, seeing that he says he has not tasted aught since late last night, and it is three of the clock even now.”

“Three!” exclaimed the Count; “is it three? How the time flies!”

“Hasting on towards eternity,” replied the priest; “it is well to think of such things.”

“It is,” answered the Lord of Ehrenstein; “he shall have food. Thanks, Father, for your pains; the poor man shall have food:—I had forgot how rapidly time speeds away from us;—thanks.”

As soon as the chaplain was gone, he read the paper over again, and marked well the scrawl which testified the Baron of Eppenfeld’s concurrence in the truth of its contents; and then he somewhat regretted that he had not made them stronger in expression, considering the facility with which it had been signed. But after having carefully locked it in a casket, he turned his thoughts to other subjects, only second in importance to that which had just been discussed and settled.

“Now, then, for this strange tale,” he said; “I cannot believe it true. He would not dare;—and yet the youth spoke boldly. It may be malice after all: I never saw aught but such reverence as might become one in his station to the daughter of his lord; nor, on her part, aught but kindness—gentle, yet not familiar—

such as she shows to all. And yet it is strange she has not come forth to greet her father on his return. She never failed before. Oh, if it be so, my vengeance shall be long remembered in the land;—but no, it is impossible!—I will never believe it. This Martin of Dillberg is a proved traitor: the Baron's words condemn him; and he has known that Ferdinand would bring him to the question, and with the common art of half-fledged villainy, has taken the poor vantage ground of the first charge. But it must be inquired into—must be refuted. I will call the youth before me:—nay, I will see her first.—But I will not tax her with it: such accusations often plant in the mind the first seeds of deeds to come. I have known many a guiltless heart made guilty by being once suspected.”

With these thoughts—for it is wonderful how often the same reflexions present themselves to the pure and to the corrupt, only their effects upon action are different—he went forth into the corridor, and opened the door of his

daughter's apartments. In the ante-chamber the girl Theresa was sitting alone at her embroidery, and the Count asked, "Where is your mistress? How is it she has not been to greet her father on his return?"

"I know not, my good lord," replied the girl, apparently embarrassed by a certain degree of sternness in his tone. "I believe my lady sleeps; I heard her say she had rested ill last night."

"Go call her," said the Count. "Sleeps at mid-day! she must be ill. We must have some physician."

The maid did not venture to reply, but went in at once to the lady's chamber; and the moment after Adelaïde herself came forth. Her fair face was as pale as death, but yet her air was firm, and she seemed to the eye but little agitated. Her step was slow, however, and showed none of the buoyant joys with which, in former times, she sprang to meet her father.

"How now, my child?" said the Count, as

soon as he saw her ; “what! sleeping at this time of day? You must be ill, Adelaide.”

“I slept not, father,” she answered at once ; “I never sleep by day.”

“Then why came you not, as usual, to meet me?” asked the Count. “In what important task have you been busy that you could not give a moment to greet your father on his return from strife?”

“In prayer,” she answered, simply.

“In prayer!” he repeated ;—“why in prayer at this hour to-day?”

“At this hour and day in every year I am in prayer,” she answered ; “for it is the hour and day my mother left me.”

A deep shade fell upon her father’s face : “True—I forgot,” he said ; “the busy occupation of the last few hours has driven from my mind things I am wont to remember : but now sit down beside me, my dear child. This foolish girl, Theresa, says you rested ill.”

“She says true,” answered Adelaide, taking

the place to which her father pointed ; “ I slept but little.”

“ And where did you ramble in your waking thoughts ? ” asked the Count.

“ Far and wide,” was her reply ; but as she answered, she bent down her head, the colour rose into her cheek, and there was a confession in her whole air which made her father’s heart beat quick and fiercely. Nearly in vain he strove to master himself, and in a hurried, yet bitter tone, he said : “ Perchance, as far as the chapel in the wood.” His daughter remained silent. “ And not without a companion,” he added. “ Base, wretched girl, what have you done ? Is this your maiden modesty ? —is this your purity and innocence of heart ? —are these the lessons that your mother taught you ? ”

Suddenly Adelaide raised her head, and though with a crimson cheek and brow, she answered, “ Yes ! Nothing, my lord,—neither deep, true love, nor human persuasion, nor girl-like folly, nor one idle dream of fancy—

would have made me do what I have done, had I not been sure that duty—ay, duty even to you, required me to forget all other things, the fears of my weak nature, the habits of my station, all the regards of which I have been ever careful,—my very name and fame, if it must be so, and do as I have done.”

“ Duty to me!” exclaimed the Count, vehemently. “ I thought you wise as well as good. You are a fool, weak girl, and have suffered a treacherous knave to impose upon you by some idle tale:—but he shall dearly rue it. Time for prayer and shrift is all that he shall have twixt now and eternity.”

“ He is my husband,” answered Adelaide; “ and ——”

“ Go, make your widow’s weeds then,” cried her father; “ for no husband will you have after to-morrow’s dawn.”

“ Yet, listen,” she said, in an imploring tone; “ condemn not before you have heard. He is guiltless of having deceived me, if I have been deceived: he told me no false tale,

for all he said was that he loved me—and that he does ; he pleaded no excuse of duty ——”

“ Who, then ? ” demanded her father ; “ who then, I say ? Ah ! I can guess right well ; that false priest, who has always been the bitterest enemy of me and mine. Is it so, girl ?—Answer, is it so ? ”

“ If you mean Father George,” replied Adelaide, slowly, “ you are right. He bade me tell you the fact, if it became absolutely necessary to do so ; but oh, my father ! you do him wrong. He is not an enemy to you and yours—far, very far ——”

“ Out upon you, wretched girl ! ” exclaimed the Count, growing more and more furious every moment. “ I know him but too well ; and for what he has done I will have bitter retribution. I will lay his abbey in smoking ruins for his sake ; but first he shall see the results of his dark intrigues on those he has attempted to force into high stations. He shall see the blood of his beggar brother’s child stain the axe, as he has well deserved—

ay, and he shall have notice that if he would ever see his face again it must be ere to-morrow. He may come to shrive him for the block, if he will ; but I swear, by all I hold holy ! that daring traitor shall never see another sun set than that which has this day arisen."

" Hold, hold, my father !" cried Adelaide ; " first, for your daughter's sake ; for, did you do the act you threaten, the blow must fall on her, not him alone. Be sure that she would not survive him long. Nay, look not scornful, for it is too true ; but, if not for her sake, for your own, pause but three days, both to give your better spirit time to act, and to allow yourself to judge with better knowledge. Oh, pause, my father ! Bring not on your head the weight of such a crime ; think what men will say of you—think how the eye of God will judge you—think what torture your own heart will inflict—how memory will ever show the spirit of the dead reproaching you, and calling you to judgment—think what it will seem in

your own eyes, when passion has passed away, to know that you have murdered in your own stronghold your daughter's husband, and, with the same blow, your own child too."

"Adelaide," said the Count, in a tone less vehement, but more stern, "what I have sworn, I will do. You have chosen your own course, the consequences be on your own head. It is you who slay him, not I; but murder!—no, there shall be no murder. He shall be judged as he deserves, this very night. We have laws and customs amongst us which will touch his case—ay, and your own too, were it needful, but that I am tender of you. However, keep your pleadings for yourself, for you yet may have need of them. As to him, his fate is sealed."

"Be his and mine together," answered Adelaide, raising her head, and gazing at her father mildly but firmly. "Let the same judgment pass on me as on him. Spare not your own child, when she is as guilty, if there be guilt, as he is. With him did I hope to

live ; with him I am content to die. You cannot, and you shall not, separate us."

" Girl, you will drive me mad !" exclaimed the Count. " Cannot separate you ! You shall soon see that. Never shall your eyes behold him again. He dies at dawn to-morrow ; and, in the mean time, hence to your chamber. There, as a prisoner, shall you remain till all is over. What further punishment I may inflict, you shall know in time ; but think not to escape. Doubtless these women are sharers in your crime, or, at least, aiders of your disobedience ;" and he turned a fierce glance on the girl Theresa, who stood pale and trembling near the door.

" Oh no, noble lord !" she exclaimed, casting herself at his knees ; " I never dreamt of such a thing—the lady knows right well."

" It shall be inquired into," said the Count. " Hence to your chamber, disobedient child ; and I will put you under safer guard than this. But delude yourself with no false hopes ; you have seen the last of him whom you call hus-

band, for I will grant him not another hour beyond the rise of sun to-morrow. Hark ! there are Count Frederick's trumpets—that suits well. He shall be judged at once. Away, I say ! Why linger you ? To your chamber—to your chamber ; but I will see that it is secure."

With a slow step Adelaide entered her own room, followed by her father. There was before her a little desk for prayer, an open book, a cross, and the picture of a lady very like herself, and, kneeling down, she bent her head upon the book,—it might be to weep, it might be to pray.

The Count's eye rested for an instant on the portrait, and then on his child. His cheek grew very pale, and, with a hasty glance around the room, he retired, securing the door behind him.

## CHAPTER X.

FERDINAND of Altenburg would have given much for a good horse, a few words in Adelaide's ear, and a free passage over the drawbridge. They were the only three wishes he would have formed, at that moment, if any good fairy would have granted them, but none of those benignant beings came to his help, and he saw that he must abide his fate, whatever it might be. For a time he bent down his eyes in deep despondency, after seeing what he conceived to be Bertha's figure turn away from the chapel in the wood ; but then, again, he gazed round him, with an anxious glance, looking to the east and to the west, as if in the vague hope of some help appearing.

The hills which stretched in a wavy line from the old ruined castle opposite, beyond the abbey in the valley, till they fell in with the mountains that formed the basin of the Rhine, were clothed, as we have seen, with wood ; but yet every here and there the forest trees would break away, and leave a patch of meadow or cultivated ground ; and in various other places the different roads that cut direct over the summits of the hills, left a small spot vacant of trees, like the entrance of a garden between two walls. Suddenly, at the point where the road leading towards Eppenfeld crossed the higher ground, the eye of the young gentleman saw something pass rapidly across, as if a band of spearmen were proceeding at a quick pace along the road above. The distance was more than two miles, and he could not be certain that he was right in his conjecture ; but at somewhat less than half a mile distant from the spot where he had seen this passing object, and nearer to the castle, a patch of vines, nestling into the bosom of the sheltering wood,

exposed the higher road again, and Ferdinand stopped in his walk upon the battlements, and gazed for several minutes, till once more the head of a long line of horsemen appeared, with banners and lances, and glittering arms, which caught and reflected a stray gleam of sunshine, that poured through the clouds gathering overhead.

“It is Count Frederick,” said the young gentleman to himself. “I am glad of that, for he is kind and noble, and if this charge, whatever it may be, rests alone upon the testimony of Martin of Dillberg, I may shake that if I have a fair hearing.”

It is true, that when Ferdinand said, in speaking of the charge, “whatever it may be,” a voice from within told him quite plainly what that charge really was; but ere the last horseman of the train had passed across the aperture, he heard the sound of footfalls at the other end of the battlement, and turning in that direction, perceived old Karl von Mosbach and two of the soldiers advancing to-

wards him. Now the character of Mosbach, though there was a general resemblance between all the old ritters of his day, differed considerably from that of Sickendorf. He was less frank and free, and though, perhaps, not so full of the active marauding spirit of his companion, was of a more suspicious and less generous nature. Neither had he ever shown that sort of warm and paternal friendliness for Ferdinand of Altenburg which the other old knight had always displayed towards the youth whom he had seen grow up from boyhood. These circumstances, and a knowledge of the task of watching him, which the Count had assigned to Karl von Mosbach, did not render his approach particularly agreeable to Ferdinand, and the first word of the old knight showed that his errand was as unpleasant as it well could be.

“Come, Master Ferdinand,” he said, “you must end your walk. I have the Count’s orders to arrest you, and put you in the cell under the little hall.”

“ What for, Mosbach,” asked Ferdinand, anxious to obtain any precise information that he could get.

“ Nay, that is no business of mine,” replied the old Ritter, “ you will soon hear from the Count himself, I dare say. My business is to obey his orders, so come along.”

Ferdinand felt no disposition to resist, where he knew that resistance would be in vain, and therefore, without further comment, he walked slowly on with Mosbach, followed by the two soldiers, and fearing that the next moment his arms might be taken from him. The old soldier, however, did not seem to think of such a precaution, but contented himself with leading him to the cell, shutting him in, and barring and bolting the door. Ferdinand was now left, if not in utter darkness—for there was one small loophole high up, which afforded air and a slight glimmering of light to the interior—at least in such a degree of obscurity, that for several minutes he could see none of the objects around, and though with his arms

crossed upon his chest, and his teeth hard set, he strove vigorously to bear his fate with firmness, if not tranquillity, the gloom of the place seemed to sink into his heart, and overcome for the time all the strongly resisting powers of youth. There was something in his present situation which depressed him much more than the imprisonment he had so lately undergone at Eppenfeld. There he knew right well, indeed, that a few hours might terminate his existence, and now the worst that could befall him was the same fate; but the difference was in the causes which might lead to such an end. At Eppenfeld, he knew that if he died, he died without reproach, in the bold execution of a duty; now, if he fell, it was under a grave and heavy charge, from which, notwithstanding all the assurances he had received from the priest, he could not wholly exculpate himself even to his own heart. He felt that passion had lent too ready an aid to the promises of others, and although he had every confidence in the

truth and honesty of him with whom his early years had been spent, yet he could hardly bring himself to believe that Father George had not both deluded and been deluded himself.

As he thus stood and mused, the sound of trumpets was borne from without through the little loophole above, and a momentary gleam of hope, he knew not why, came to cheer his heart. But the sounds of the trumpet soon ceased, the trampling of horses was heard as they crossed the drawbridge, and then many voices in the court-yard, first laughing and talking loud, then growing fewer and fainter, till at length they ceased; and no other sounds arose but the occasional call of one servant to another, or the heavy tramp of a soldier's foot, as he crossed the courts, or threaded the passages. Hope and expectation died away again, and the captive sat himself down to meditate bitterly over the passing away of all those bright dreams we have so lately seen him indulging. Where was the joy of the night

before? Where was the sunshiny aspect of life that love, and youth, and imagination afforded? Where was the glowing future, with its hopes and its ambitions—ambitions, the fiery strength of which was all softened and sweetened by tenderness and love? Where was the ecstasy of gratified affection? Where all the splendid pageantry with which fancy decorates the gratification of every desire to the eager early heart? All, all had passed away—the bubble had burst, the vision had faded, and nothing was left but dark despondency, akin to despair. He could have wept, but then the stubborn heart of man, the touch of the sin which hurled the powers from on high, the pride of hardy resistance, came to his support, and he refrained, closing up the sources of his tears, and strengthening himself in the hardness of resolute endurance.

“No,” he thought,—“I will give up such weak regrets; I will think no more of things that only unman me; I will consider how I may best meet this charge—what I am to do,

what I am to say ; and I can say much in my defence. Who could resist such love as I have felt for her ? Who could help feeling that love who was with her as I have been ? Then, again, Father George, the guardian of my youth, whose counsel and directions I have ever been taught to follow, he directed, he guided, he counselled me to act as I have acted, even when I myself hesitated and doubted. He authorized me, too, to lay the deed on him, and promised to come forward and support it. The Count may indeed condemn me, may put me to death, but still I shall die without a stain."

The more he thus reasoned, however, the more Ferdinand felt that his own case was a perilous one, that although some excuse might be found for what he had done in the extenuating circumstances over which he pondered, yet that excuse would be but little available to save him from destruction. He knew the Count too well, not to be sure that some victim he would have to assuage his

wrath, and that, as against Father George his hand would be powerless, protected as the priest would be sure to be by the arm of the church, the whole weight of his indignation would fall upon him. Thus he thought for some time; but yet, though his considerations were eager and full of interest, they were not sufficient to make the passing of the time seem quick. Hour by hour went by, various sounds succeeded each other in the castle, each marking some particular epoch in the passing of the day, to the ear of one who, like Ferdinand of Altenburg, knew well the stated periods of the daily life within; every moment he expected to be called to judgment and to doom; but still the time fled and no summons came, till darkness covered the face of the earth, and he heard the sound of revelry above. Oh! how dissonant, how painful, how unlike it had ever been before, was the merry voice and the gay laugh, and the cheerful noise of the banquet! He thought it a cruelty in the Count to place him there, a mute and sorrowful ear-witness

of happy life, in which he was no more to partake ; and bending down his head, he covered his eyes with his hands, but it must have been to shut out the sights that fancy offered, for in the profound gloom around him no other object was to be discerned.

While he thus sat, he suddenly heard a sound, as if of the clanking of an iron chain, and then a voice spoke, apparently close beside him.

“Fear not, youth,” it said ; “be thy heart bold, be thy words true, be thy faith pure, and fear not !” Ferdinand started up and listened, almost fancying that his imagination had deceived him. The sounds had seemed to come from the opposite side to that on which the door was placed, and they were clear and distinct. It was a voice, too, that he knew not. That of Father George he would have recognised anywhere ; but it was not his. The tones were deep and firm, like those of a man ; and yet there was a sad and solemn sound in them, which filled Ferdinand’s mind with doubt and awe.

“Who is it that speaks?” he said; and instantly the voice answered, “It matters not. It is one who knows. Hast thou not seen enough to make thee believe?”

“I have,” answered Ferdinand; “and I do.”

But the voice replied not again; and all was silent. The sounds above had by this time changed their character. Laughter had ceased, the merriment and the revel seemed over; and though voices were heard speaking, the tones of some were stern and grave, the tones of another low and apparently suppliant. For many minutes, Ferdinand’s ear listened eagerly, as the speakers continued; but then steps were heard coming down the stairs, and through the sort of wide vestibule that separated the cell in which he was confined from the great hall. An instant after, the key was turned in the lock, the bolts were drawn back, and the door opened.

## CHAPTER XI.

WHILE such had been the fate of the lover, what was the situation of Adelaide of Ehrenstein? She, too, had suffered; but not so deeply as he had. There was something in her heart that supported her; a conscious innocence of purpose; a degree of faith and trust which man seldom, if ever, can attain; a readiness for the worst, whatever it might be; a full assurance that she could not, and that she would not, survive him whom she loved, if death were to be his fate; and a fearlessness of death itself, very different from man's bold daring. In her love there was, as is almost always the case in woman's first early attachment, a great difference from the passion of her lover. It was less of the earth than

his; and though Ferdinand's was pure, and true, and bright,—though he would willingly have sacrificed life, and all that life can give, for her sake,—yet hers was purer and holier still. He dreamt of long days of joy and happiness with her, in the midst of the fair scenes and warm blessings of this earth. She might have such visions also, but they were not so vivid, and they went beyond. She thought of happiness eternal with the chosen of her heart—of joy, and peace, and sweet communion with the spirit of her husband, in that union which could know no change, and never see an end. It might be hard to cast off all the tender bonds of mortal affection, to give away the love and bliss we know even for the promises of eternity. She might feel a longing to spend with him the ordinary days of existence here, and to pass with him from the affections of this earth, calmly and peacefully to the brighter fate of the good beyond the tomb. But yet the thought—ever present, ever distinct—that existence here is but a brief portion of an endless being, and that, though

the passage may be sharp and full of grief, it leads to compensation and reward hereafter, was sweet and consolatory to her in her sorrow, and gave her strength to endure in contemplation all that might follow.

She had time enough for thought, and for tears, and for prayer; for during the whole evening, from the time that her father left her in anger, till the shades of night crept over the sky, her solitude was only interrupted twice. Once a heavy footfall came to the door, the key was turned, and there was heard a sharp knock. On saying "Come in," the form of a common soldier presented itself, bearing some provisions, and having set his burden down upon the table, he retired without a word, again locking the door behind him. The second time another soldier came, affording admission for a few minutes to the girl Theresa, who could give her mistress no information, and who was still drowned in tears of apprehension for herself. Adelaide questioned her but little, for she had never much trusted her; and there was an undefined feeling of suspicion

in regard to the girl's attachment to her, which she blamed herself for entertaining, yet could not banish. All the girl knew was, that Count Frederick of Leiningen had arrived, and that he and her lord were about to sit down to supper in the smaller hall ; that Ferdinand of Altenburg had been arrested, and was confined in one of the dungeons ; and that all in the castle were busily talking over the events which had taken place. A bright colour came into Adelaide's cheek as she heard that her own conduct was the subject of discussion amongst her father's followers and his guest's ; and very mingled emotions brought tears into her eyes ; but she asked no further questions, and gave no orders, although it was for the purpose of rendering her any ordinary service that the girl had been admitted for a short time to her chamber. The soldier who had remained without soon grew impatient, and called to Theresa to come away ; and Adelaide once more remained alone, while the shadows of gloomy thought came darkening over her mind as those of the evening crept over the sky. She

sat and read the holy book before her, pausing every now and then to think, as long as there was any light left. But at length all was darkness ; for neither lamp nor taper was brought her, and she passed the hours in meditation, in tears, and in listening to the various sounds that stirred in the castle, till all was silent. Though striving hard to banish painful images, yet fancy would present to her eyes scenes which might be passing very near the spot where she sat, without her knowing them or their results. She pictured to herself the short, brief trial which was all that was likely to be afforded to him she loved ; she saw him standing before his judges ; she heard them pronounce sentence upon him ; she beheld him dragged back to his cell, only to await execution on the following morning, and her heart sank—oh, how sorrowfully it sank !—at the thought that she had no power to help him. Her eyes overflowed with tears again, and, kneeling before the place where the crucifix stood, she once more had recourse to prayer.

All had seemed silent in the castle for

near half an hour, but she was still upon her knees, with her head bent down, when her father's well-known step sounded in the neighbouring chamber; and the next instant he entered with a light. Touched, perhaps, a little, he might be, at the sight of his daughter's grief and desolation, but still his frown was not relaxed, and no kindlier feelings shone upon his lip.

“What! have they not brought thee a lamp?” he said, as she rose on his entrance. “Take this, and go to bed and sleep, for thou must rise betimes to-morrow. I came to tell thee thy fate—his is sealed. At early dawn, under the guard of a party of men-at-arms thou goest to Wurtzburg; there to pass the days of thy widowhood in the convent of the Black Nuns, and to learn, I trust, in penitence and prayer, the duty and obedience of a daughter.”

“The days will be few,” answered Adelaide, in an absent tone. “Can nothing move you, my father?” she continued. “I ask you not to spare me—I ask you to spare him, to spare

yourself; for bitterly, till the last hour of life, will you regret it if you injure him. Nay, hear, my father, for I am as calm as you are—but wait a few hours, give not way to hasty passion, see and hear him who counselled us in what we have done, and judge not till you have heard."

"I have judged," answered the Count, turning away from her; "and others have judged who are moved by no hasty passion. Give me no more words, girl. His doom is fixed, I say. He shall not die till thou art beyond the hills; but yet to-morrow's sun shall not be one hour old before he pays with his head for the crime he has committed. No words, no words;" and, leaving her the lamp he carried, he retired, and closed the door.

It is with difficulty that a kind and gentle heart realizes in imagination acts of severity and harshness of which it is itself incapable. Though Adelaide had feared, and trembled throughout the day, with vague apprehensions of her father carrying his menaces into effect; though she knew him to be stern and hard;

though through life fear had mingled with affection, yet she loved him too well to know him thoroughly; for love has always a power of transfusing, as it were, the life-blood of our own character into the object of our affection; and when she was so gentle, she could not believe that he was so cruel. The words he spoke, however, before he left her, the air and manner in which they were uttered; the deep depression of her mind, from long hours of grief and anxiety; the still and gloomy time of night; all tended to give the vivid semblance of reality to the deed which he announced to her. Could it be possible? she asked herself. Could he really imbue his hands in the blood of him she loved—of one so kind, so good, so brave, so true? Should she never see him more? Oh, no, no; it was too horrible to think of. It was impossible. Her father would never do it.

But as she thus stood on the same spot where he had left her, gazing earnestly on the ground which she did not see, there was a light knock at the door, and she started, but with

out replying. The knock was repeated, and she said "Come in."

A low, woman's voice, however, answered, "I cannot, lady, the door is locked. Put down your ear to the keyhole."

Mechanically she did as she was told, asking, "What is it?"

"They have condemned him, lady," said the voice. "I heard them say myself, 'Worthy of death,' and then they hurried him away. I cannot stay for fear some one should come," and a retreating step immediately announced that the speaker had departed.

It was true then—too true. He was judged—he was to die—to die for love of her—to die for an act in which she had taken willing part; which she had not only shared, but encouraged. And did her father expect that she would survive him; that she would see the lover of her youth, the husband of a night, thus perish for her sake? that she would live on in the cold world that he had left? Did he expect her to mingle in its gaieties, to take part in its panaegts, to taste its enjoyments, to laugh

with the merry, and sing with the light of heart?

“ He knows me not,” she said ; “ he knows me not. The blow that takes my husband’s life, takes mine also. It was unkindness, I do believe, that brought my mother slowly to her grave, and this cruelty will be more pitiful in bringing me speedily to mine.”

Casting herself into a seat, she remained in the same position for more than two hours, with her head drooping forward, her beautiful eyes partly closed, her hands clasped together and fallen upon her knee. Not a motion was to be seen in that fair statue. One might have supposed her sleeping or dead. Sleeping, oh, no ; sleep was far, far away. It seemed as if such relief would be banished for ever, and that grief—aye waking—would never know cessation. Dead ! She longed to be so ; but she knew that long suffering must be first. The lamp flickered at first brightly, showing the exquisite features in their still motionless repose, and the graceful line of each symmetrical limb, as it fell in the dull tranquillity of

profound grief. From time to time the ray glittered on a tear—not the quick relief-drop of violent emotion rushing plentiful and fast from the eyes like a summer shower—no; but the slow, quiet, trickling tear stealing over the cheek, and pausing here and there, but still swelling over as the fresh supply is wrung from the eye by the slow agony of the heart. They fell unheeded. She knew not that she wept.

Not a word escaped her, not a sound passed from her lips. There was no sigh, no sob, no mark of bitter passion; but there she sat, silent and motionless, absorbed in the contemplation of the dark reality ever present to her mind.

The light of the lamp waxed dim and smoky, as the heavy hours rolled on, but Adelaide sat there still; and in the increasing gloom of the chamber, where the faint rays were absorbed as soon as they touched the dark oak wainscotting, her form clothed in white garments, seemed like that of a spectre, and all the other objects in the room like the faint

unreal phantasms of a confused dream. But who is that who suddenly stands beside her? —An old man in a long grey robe, with sandalled feet, a cowl over his head, and steps so noiseless, that in the terrible apathy of despair she hears them not.

She started up the next instant, gazing wildly at him, and thrusting back the glossy masses of neglected curls from off her marble brow.

“I have come to save you, my dear child,” said Father George. “Be quick, cast something over you, and come with me.”

The fair girl threw her arms around his neck, and fell upon his bosom, “Ferdinand! Ferdinand!” she murmured. “Save him, Father, save him. Mind not me. I can bear my fate, whatever it is. Oh, save him, save him! They have condemned him to death. If morning dawns, he is lost.”

“He is safe, daughter” answered Father George. “Safe, and by this time, I trust, far away. I have left him to those who will not, and who cannot fail.”

“Oh, but is it sure?” demanded Adelaide. “Did you see him go? My father’s words were dreadful. He would set a sure guard. He would leave no chance. Are you sure that he is safe?”

“As safe as I am,” answered Father George, confidently. “The stones of this castle would sooner fall, than one hair of his head under your father’s vengeance. Come, my child, come; make no more delay. It is now near daybreak. Take but your mother’s picture, and your veil to wrap you in, and come away with speed.”

Joy was perhaps more overpowering than grief to Adelaide of Ehrenstein. Her hands trembled, her limbs well nigh refused their office; but yet she hurried her brief preparation as much as might be; and then the monk took her by the hand, and blowing out the lamp, led her on. The door of her chamber was open, though she had not heard it unlocked. The antechamber without was vacant, and the last rays of the sinking moon were streaming through the windows against the

wall. Everything in the castle was still as death, and in the wide corridor all was vacant and silent, with the carved figures on the stone seats grinning in the pale reflected light that poured from the sky through the small panes. The feet of both the lady and her guide were noiseless, for her step, like her heart, was lightened ; and though she trembled still, she hurried on down the wide staircase, and the narrower flight of steps that led from the lesser hall to the old stone vestibule near the greater hall. At the door of the latter, Father George paused, and knocked thrice ; and then whispering, “ Fear nothing,” he opened the door, and led her in.

There was a light in the hall, streaming from a single lamp at the farther end. It was faint and dim in the vast space ; but Adelaide started, drew back, and uttered a low cry of surprise, as she saw how that hall was tenanted. Seated in the great chair of state, at the end, was a tall and lordly looking man, clothed in arms from head to heel, and down either side, ranged in long line, were other forms in

armour, some with their swords bare, and some with banners in their hands, which seemed to her terrified eye the same as those which usually hung from the vaulted roof above. Every man had his visor down, and all was profoundly silent; but the stern array daunted the poor girl's heart, and she turned an eager glance to the countenance of her companion.

“Fear not,” said Father George, in a low voice; “fear not, only come on quickly,” and supporting her shaking steps with his arm, he led her on through that dark avenue towards the door at the farther end. None spoke, none moved, as she passed along nearly to the close of the line; but then the seated figure rose, and bowed his head without a sound. Hurrying her on towards the door, the monk opened it, and led her into the stone passage through which she had before passed. There was a lamp burning on the floor; and quitting his hold of her arm, Father George whispered, “Stay for me one moment,” and then returned into the hall.

Turning a timid glance back, Adelaide saw him approach the chair of state and speak for a few moments, in a low voice, to its mailed occupant. He seemed to receive no answer; and then clasping his hands together, in the attitude of vehement entreaty, the old man said aloud, “I beseech, I adjure you! By all that is sacred! In the name of Christ, forbear.”

The figure bowed its armed head; and, exclaiming, “Well,” Father George turned away, and hurried to her side again.

## CHAPTER XII.

As soon as Father George had rejoined Adelaide of Ehrenstein, he hurried her rapidly on through the passage, and down the well staircase, towards the vaults ; but in pushing back the door which opened into the serfs' burial-place, a sharp gust of wind blew out the lamp, and they were both left in utter darkness.

"I cannot go back for a light," said the priest ; "but hold by my gown ; and fear not, daughter."

The sights she had seen, however, in that place, and all the awful mementoes of mortality which it contained, recurred at once to the mind of Adelaide, and a chilly shuddering

sensation crept over her as she followed Father George, holding his robe with her right hand, and feeling the way with her left. Scarcely had they taken a step, however, when a voice demanded aloud, “Who is it comes hither?”

“It is I,” answered the priest, without pausing; “give way to the holy cross.” No farther sounds succeeded, except the shriek of a screech-owl, as it flitted past; but the moment after, the out-stretched hand of Adelaide came upon something cold, and round, and damp, which she instantly perceived to be a mouldering human skull, and, drawing her arms suddenly back, the movement was succeeded by a rattling noise, as if a pile of bones had fallen down, one striking upon the other. Then came a loud laugh, and a whispering through the arches, and the poor girl faltered on her way, and drew back.

“Fear not, fear not,” said Father George, hurrying her on again. “All depends upon speed; let us lose no time. Where is that other door? It should be here.—There is

nothing but the wall. We must have got astray amongst the arches?"

Adelaide's heart sank with fear, and, leaning against the damp stone-work of the vault, she supported herself with difficulty, while the priest felt with his hand in order to discover which way the door lay. Even he seemed puzzled and alarmed, as he proceeded slowly, saying in broken, muttered sentences, "This is very unlucky. It must be this way, surely. Keep close by me, daughter, and hold fast by my robe. It is no jest to lose oneself here. Nay, this is the other wall; we must have gone wrong again. Stay, I must have recourse to other means—do not be alarmed." And, raising his voice, he added, in a loud tone, "Let the chapel door be opened!"

There was a pause, and then a slight rustling sound, and then the creaking of a heavy door upon a rusty hinge, and the moment after, at some distance from them on the left, a faint light, which would not have deserved the name but from the more profound gloom of the vaults, showed where the door was placed.

“ Now, quick, quick, my child ;” said Father George. “ Lean upon my arm ; there is no need of terror. ’T is but that I would fain avoid bringing about hasty deeds that can never be recalled. Day must be coming fast, by that light ; but we shall yet have time.” And, hurrying her through the door into the crypt, he took his way onward toward the rach which led out upon the side of the hill.

No farther obstruction presented itself, no living object was seen, and, hastening after her old guide, Adelaide soon felt the fresh chilly air, which in most countries precedes the dawn of day, breathing cold upon her cheek. Not a streak was yet to be seen in the eastern sky, the light clouds above were untouched with the rays of the coming sun, and the stars were seen peeping through them here and there, but yet there was a silvery greyness mingling with the darkness of the night, and showing plainly that morning was at hand.

“ Now, my child, all is safe, I trust,” said the priest, as they issued forth. “ Take heart, take

heart, for you must still walk down to the chapel. I could not have the horses brought up here."

"Is Ferdinand there?" asked Adelaide, anxiously.

"Nay, nay; he 's farther than that by this time, I trust," answered Father George; "but you shall soon join him, where there will be more safety for both." Thus saying, he led her on; endeavouring to while away the time, and cheer her spirits, with kindly words and assurances; but Adelaide felt deeply depressed; and neither to feel herself free from the threatened danger, nor to hear the monk's assurances of her husband's safety, could rouse her from the dread and apprehension that still hung upon her.

When they were about half way down the hill, and the twilight had so far increased that they could see the faint outline of the little chapel from a point of the rock, Father George paused, and looked down towards it with a somewhat anxious gaze. "It is very odd," he muttered to himself; "they must have put them on the other side, I suppose, to

keep them out of sight ; ” and with a still quicker step he hurried on down the hill, and soon, with his fair companion, reached the chapel-door.

“ Go in, my child, and say an *Ave* and a *Paternoster*,” he said, “ while I look for the horses round here ; ” and as he spoke he pulled open the door of the chapel for the lady to go in. He then went quite round the little building, and, returning to the door of the priest’s lodging-chamber, shook it, exclaiming, “ Brother Geoffrey, brother Geoffrey ! ” No answer was returned, and, entering the chapel, he said, in a tone of some alarm, though he strove hard to conceal it, “ The horses have not come, my child, though they should have been here an hour ago ; but you will be quite safe here. Come with me into the cell. You can take some refreshment there while I go and seek them.”

“ Oh ! do not leave me,” cried Adelaide ; “ I shall die with fear, if I am left alone.”

“ No, no—not so,” answered the priest ; “ I will show you in a moment that you are quite

safe ;" and, drawing a key from under his gown, he opened the door which led from the little chapel to the lodging-chamber at its side, and entered with the lady.

The cell was quite vacant ; but on a shelf at one side stood a bottle of wine and some provisions, which the priest soon placed before Adelaide, and insisted upon her partaking thereof, though appetite she had none. "Now, I will go and see for the horses," he said, as soon as he had made her swallow a morsel, and taste the wine. "But first I must show you—Hark ! they are coming, I think. Did you not hear a sound ?"

"It is from the other side—it is from the castle," cried Adelaide, starting up in terror ; and the monk instantly crossed to a little lancet-shaped window which looked up the hill, saying, at the same time, in a confident tone, "No fear if it be, my child."

The next instant he turned round, nodded his head significantly, and locked the door into the chapel ; then advancing to the spot where his pallet lay, with the crucifix at the head, he

put his hand upon one of the large blocks of stone which formed the wall of the building, and pressed against it with no great effort. It instantly gave way, however, rolling back, as a door, upon a strong perpendicular bar of iron run through the angle of the block,\* and disclosing the lower steps of a little staircase, to which he motioned his fair companion. “ Quick ; go in, my child,” he said, in a low tone, while the horses’ feet came clattering down the hill ; and with breathless haste Adelaide darted forward, and ran some way up the steps. Father George followed, pushed back the block of stone, and secured it with a bolt. “ Go on, daughter,” he said ; and, feeling her way up ; for the stairs were quite in darkness, she soon came to a doorway leading into the belfry over the little chapel. Father George followed her, and reached the belfry just as two armed horsemen checked their beasts at the door. One of them, springing down, entered the chapel in haste, but returned immediately, exclaiming aloud,

\* A door, precisely similar to that described, is still to be seen in the old castle of Baden-Baden.

“ He’s not in there ; and that door’s locked.”

“ Try the other,” cried his companion ; and the man who had dismounted going up to the door of the cell, shook it as if he would have forced it off its hinges, exclaiming aloud, “ Father George, Father George !”

The good priest smiled, but replied not, and the next moment the man without, exclaiming, with an oath, “ I will see if he’s within or not,” dashed his gauntleted hand through the lower part of the window, which was dim with dust and age, and, holding by the stone-work, looked into the cell.

“ There’s no one there,” he said at length. “ Where, in the fiend’s name, can the monk be ?”

“ Gone to the devil, I suppose,” answered the other man, “ who has got more of his companions than they suspect at the abbey, I fancy. But, at all events, we must go back as fast as may be. The Count won’t catch him in a hurry, I should think.”

While he had been speaking, his companion

remounted, and they rode off together towards the castle.

“Now, my child, you will not be afraid to stay here,” said the priest, turning to Adelaide, as soon as the men were gone. “I will not be long ere I am back, and no harm can happen to you.”

“I shall have less fear,” replied the lady; “but yet I shall be afraid. Day is breaking—how shall I ever escape? But look,” she continued, pointing towards the wood, as she stood with her face to the arch over the bell, “there is a horse coming up that path, and another behind.”

“Brother Geoffrey at last!” exclaimed Father George. “What can have detained him so long?”

“But it is already day,” answered Adelaide, in a desponding tone. “We shall be pursued, and overtaken.”

“No fear, daughter; no fear,” answered the good priest. “See you not that you go well guarded?” and he pointed to a number of horsemen, habited like the serving brothers of

the abbey, who were now coming out of the path which they had been following, into the small open space before the chapel.

“Alas!” said the lady; “what could these good men do against my father’s soldiers?”

“There are more who watch for you than you know,” said the priest; “and if these were not enough, there are others on the road ready and careful; but each of these, daughter, is equal at any time to a man-at-arms, and not unpractised either. However, I will go with you till you are beyond all danger, and you may be well assured that I will do my best to avoid all risk of strife. Now, come with me, and rely upon my counsels, nor doubt that they will guide you to safety at last, though I warned you from the first that there were dangers and sorrows to be encountered.”

While he had been speaking, Adelaide’s eye had been resting upon the brake through which the cavalcade was advancing; and at length, to her joy and surprise, she saw a woman’s figure appear amongst the rest. Father George remarked the expression of

satisfaction that passed over her face; and though she spoke not, he replied to her thoughts, saying, “It is your girl, Bertha: they have thrown a nun’s gown over her and a veil, which is not quite right, perhaps; but the end justifies the means.”

The good priest’s maxim is undoubtedly an immoral one, though Father George, with some small faults, was a moral and conscientious man; but that maxim was, and is, and probably ever will be, a favourite one with the church to which he belonged. Leading Adelaide down, then, and feeling quite secure in the numbers which now surrounded the chapel, he threw open the door of his cell; and—while Bertha, with joy, embraced her fair mistress, asked a thousand questions which there was but little time to answer, and told how she had not dared to return to the castle, but had found protection and shelter in the village beside the Abbey—the monk conversed with a brother of the order who came with the train, and heard the various impediments which had prevented their appearance sooner. Their

conversation was short, however, for day had already dawned; and Adelaide was speedily mounted upon a horse, which had been brought thither for her service, and covered with the habit of a nun, which Bertha carried with her. Father Geoffrey dismounted from the mule he rode to take the place of his brother priest at the chapel; and Father George got into the saddle to lead and direct the party.

By narrow and circuitous paths through the wood, avoiding as far as possible every spot where they could be seen from the walls of the castle, the monk and his companions wound their way round to the stream, taking care to approach it as if they were coming from the side of the abbey. Adelaide, as they went along, conversed for some time with Bertha, in an under tone, turning quickly every now and then to gaze around, as the terrors, which she could not shake off, recurred again and again to her mind. When they approached the river, however, renewed apprehensions for him she loved seemed to take possession of her,

from something that Bertha had said; and approaching closer to the side of the priest, she once more inquired, in an eager and anxious tone, “Are you sure he is safe—quite sure?”

“As sure as any one can be of anything in this life, daughter,” answered Father George; “of nothing here below can we be perfectly certain. But I myself entertain no doubt.”

His words were not as satisfactory to Adelaide as perhaps he expected. She would fain have had him repeat over and over again every assurance he had given of Ferdinand’s safety. The strongest, the most positive terms, could hardly have reassured her; and the admission even of a chance of the evil she dreaded, made her heart sink.

As it was absolutely necessary to ford the river, Father George paused at the edge of the meadow before they quitted the covering of the wood, to direct those who followed to make as much speed as possible, after they issued forth, to gain the shelter of the trees opposite.

But while he was still speaking, the sound of a trumpet was heard; apparently proceeding from the gates of the castle above. It only served, however, to hasten the good monk's movements; and putting his mule into a quick pace, he led the way to a ford over the stream. The trumpet sounded again, just as they reached the bank and came in full view of the walls. Each naturally turned the head in the direction of the castle; but there an unexpected sight presented itself. The gateway beyond the drawbridge was crowded with men, the figures distinct, though the faces could not be seen: but none seemed mounted for pursuit, and all were apparently occupied with another and more terrible act. On the drawbridge itself were seen three figures: one kneeling, one in the long robes of a priest, standing at some distance, and one, with long bare arms, uplifting a ponderous axe. Just as Adelaide's eyes were turned in that direction, the axe fell upon the neck of the kneeling figure, and a loud, wild shriek burst from her lips. Bertha, who was close beside her, caught her firmly,

or she would have fallen headlong into the stream; but the lady's eyes swam faintly for a moment, and then all was darkness and unconsciousness.

## CHAPTER XIII.

WE must now return to other personages in the castle of Ehrenstein; for the ways of life are like the roads through a country, where, though many of them may be close together, events of great importance may be passing on each, totally unknown to those who are travelling along the others, although very probably they may be deeply interested in the occurrences which are taking place so near at hand.

In gay and gallant array, with arms gleaming and trumpets sounding, but at a much quicker pace than he had employed on his first visit to the castle, Count Frederick of Leiningen swept up towards the drawbridge, after having seen the stronghold of the Baron of Eppenfeld irreparably destroyed. His face

was somewhat graver than it had been on the former occasion, and his followers remarked that he mused more than was his wont. No one was by his side but his jester, and with him he conversed from time to time; but their conversation seemed to those who watched them, much more sad and serious than might be expected in a brave soldier who had just added new laurels to his wreath, when talking with so merry a companion. Behind them came several of the Count's knights and attendants, and with them Martin of Dillberg, who had encountered them by the way, and, after speaking a few words with his lord, had ridden on to take his usual place in the train. The young man did not seem at all at his ease, however, though nothing of any very great moment had occurred, since his meeting with the Count, to bring gloom upon his brow. His lord had heard what he had to say without comment. He had neither smiled nor frowned upon him, but simply told him to go and take his station. His companions in the train had said little beyond what might give him an

account of the fall of Eppenfeld in answer to his questions. But there are slight signs of manner more strongly indicative of the thoughts within than even spoken words ; and there was a dryness in the answers of the soldiery, a keeping aloof from him, a want of free communication, which instantly struck Martin of Dillberg as symptoms by no means pleasant. What conclusions he drew thence does not much signify to inquire ; but after he had ridden along with the rest for about half a mile, he reined in his horse, and was turning it towards the rear, when one of the old knights exclaimed, “ Holla, youth ; keep your place. Whither away so fast ? ”

“ I was but going to have a look at the prisoners,” said Martin of Dillberg.

“ There are no prisoners,” answered the old knight. “ They were all sent on with the Count of Ehrenstein ; so keep your rank.”

Martin of Dillberg was well aware that he was no great favourite amongst his lord’s retainers ; but there was something marked about their demeanour towards him, on the

present occasion, which made him feel that uneasiness which a guilty heart always experiences at the prospect of discovery. He saw, too, that there were keen eyes upon him, and consequently that there was no chance of escape; and thus he was forced to ride on till they reached the gates of Ehrenstein, meditating, with a quick and subtle wit, the plan of his future conduct.

The drawbridge was down; and old Karl von Mosbach, with a number of men-at-arms, ready to receive Count Frederick, stood under the gateway. But the Count of Ehrenstein was not himself present; and his noble guest had dismounted from his horse, and given some orders to his attendants, before the lord of the castle appeared. He apologised in courteous terms, but with a somewhat absent air, on the plea of having been engaged in important business; and his eye, while he was speaking, ran over the followers of his friend, till it rested upon Martin of Dillberg. Just as it did so, one of the soldiers of Count Frederick took the youth by the arm, and whispered

something in his ear, which instantly made his face turn deadly pale. “What have I done?” he said, aloud; looking to the Count of Ehrenstein. “I have but given true and just information against a false traitor.”

“Nay, my lord,” said the Count, addressing his friend; “this good youth has rendered me a service,—I pray you, deal not harshly with him.”

“He shall be dealt with, noble lord, according to his merits,” replied Count Frederick, laying his hand familiarly and good-humouredly upon the other’s shoulder, but not in the least betraying any wavering or want of firmness in his tone. “Take him away; and do as I have ordered. We will discuss his affairs more at leisure.”

“What a sweet thing it is,” said the jester, “to hear the lamb interceding for the wolf; the dove pleading for the kite. One would think that the Lord of Ehrenstein had no value for golden ducats, that he would deal so tenderly with him who well nigh prevented them from reaching his hands; but tender-

heartedness is the virtue of great men of all classes ; and Heaven, which made me a great fool, made me tender-hearted also. Faith ! I could weep to think of so pretty a lad being whipped for just teaching other boys to steal the apples which he had not wit or strength to steal himself."

" What means he, my good lord ?" asked the Count of Ehrenstein, turning from the jester to Count Frederick.

" Now, Heaven save me from being a man of wit and letters !" cried the jester ; " they have ever so many meanings in their own heads, that they can never tell what another man means."

" He would say, Ehrenstein," answered Count Frederick, " that over that youth, whom they are now leading away, hangs the heaviest of charges ; the last of many that have been brought against him. He has had full warning thrice before, and thrice has he had forgiveness. Now he shall have fair hearing, and speedy justice. But, for the present, let us speak of gayer things. We will sit and hear his cause

some quiet hour this evening. Eppenfeld will hold no more plunderers. The great tower is down ; the walls blasted and riven ; and if any wolves henceforth inhabit it, they must walk on four legs, and wear hairy coats. How goes it with your fair daughter ? Faith ! her summer smile has well nigh warmed my wintry heart into a flame."

" She is ill," replied the Count, abstractedly ; and then, after a pause of silent thought, he murmured to himself, " There may be malice in the telling, yet truth in the tale ; but what need I more ? She has confessed it herself."

" Come, come, my noble friend," said Count Frederick, " do not grieve or be apprehensive ; this is some light illness of your fair daughter's ; it will soon pass away."

" I fear not," answered the Count. " But come, we will to the hall, and after supper we will have discussion of other things ; for I, too, have a cause to try, and a prisoner to judge ; and, if I comprehend the words of our friend here rightly, one axe may serve for two."

These were grave and somewhat bitter words ;

and, in our days of softness and refinement, we cannot well comprehend how such sanguinary thoughts as they expressed could mingle with revelry and merriment; but in those times the case was very different; and if men had suffered themselves to be made sad by dark and cruel purposes, there would have been few cheerful hours in life. We must remember that blood-shed formed a part of their sports. War was not only a profession, but an amusement. The sight of violent death, the habit of encountering it themselves, and the little security that existed against its occurrence at any moment, hardened them to inflict it lightly upon others; and the Count of Ehrenstein strove to throw off the gloom which anger and a thirst for vengeance, rather than awe at his own sanguinary intentions, had brought upon him, and resumed a gay and cheerful air, as he led Count Frederick to the lesser hall. He spoke of supping speedily, and was giving orders to that effect; but his guest exclaimed, “ Nay, though I be hungry enough, in sooth, I must first wash this gunpowder from my face and hands. I

have a letter, too, that I would fain write ; so that, if it will not spoil your meal, I would deny my hungry stomach for a couple of hours."

It was arranged according to his wish ; and, retiring to his apartments, he remained there, less, it would seem, in writing than in conversation. The jester and one of his knights accompanied him. His chaplain was sent for, and then two more of his retainers ; and though at the close of the time he had stated, a messenger with a sealed packet was sent off to Hardenburg, yet, sooth to say, the words that the letter contained were but few.

Not long after, he joined his entertainer in the hall, and found him walking up and down between Mosbach and Sickendorf. The latter seemed not well pleased with what was passing ; and, as the door opened for Count Frederick, and the old knight saw that his further conversation with his lord would soon be interrupted, he replied hastily to something which had gone before, " Well, my lord, well, it is very true what you say ; but if you would

take my advice, you would wait, and get cool. You may think better of it yet. He is brave and stout-hearted, cool and skilful, and will make as good a man-at-arms as ever lived. He is noble, too; and, with God's blessing and good luck, there is no telling what he may reach to."

"He has reached too high already," answered the Count, gloomily. "We will make his arm shorter;" and he turned to welcome his guest to the hall.

The meal passed in the usual course; and though hungry men will be silent till the first keen edge of appetite is taken off, yet, when sad havoc had been made amongst the huge joints of meat, the capons, the geese, the ducks, which loaded the table, laughter and merriment soon began to spread around; the wine-cup circulated freely; the wine was good, and every one seemed to vie with his fellow in doing justice to it.

"Drink fast, drink fast," said the jester to an old knight who sat near, for the sport is yet to come. "My good lords, I pray you tell

me," he continued, "what is the use of taking young men's heads off?"

"To prevent them doing mischief with them, Herr Narren," answered Count Frederick.

"A bad reason, uncle, a bad reason," answered the jester, "as I will show you upon three propositions. First, because it is not true, as you never think of taking their heads off till the mischief is done; next, because, if you always used that precaution, you would not be able to execute it, as, if all the young men's heads were taken off, there would be no old ones to take them off; next, because it defeats its own object, as, if you take their heads off, they are sure to fall into corruption, and to fall into corruption, the church tells us, is a grievous sin. Marry! we should have fine shaving of our shoulders if the practice was generally carried out. I doubt me much, if it had begun earlier, that most of those sitting here would be nine inches shorter, and much less mischief would have been done in the world. I can understand right well the taking of a cork out of a flask of wine, or the head

off a barrel of pickled herrings; but why men should chop off the top story of the soul's house, as the cook does the root of a turnip, I could never divine. Marry! it puzzles me, and I have never yet heard the problem explained."

"Faith! jester," said the Count of Ehrenstein, "it is not in every barrel of pickled herrings that one finds such a fish as thou art."

"Truly not," answered the other; "many things in life come from places whence they are least expected."

His words seemed to throw the Count into deep thought; but the jester, who seemed, after the manner of his class, to have cast a random bolt which had hit hard without his knowing or intending it, rambled on to other subjects, jesting rather sharply with old Sickendorf, who seemed in no humour to be pleased with merriment. In the mean time, Count Frederick addressed some words to his host, which roused the other from his reverie, and they spoke together for several

minutes in low tones, till at length the rising of the Count of Ehrenstein gave notice that the banquet was over. The boards were speedily cleared, the tables carried away, and while some sauntered forth to walk upon the battlements, or in the court-yards, in the fresh night air, others were preparing themselves for the usual pastimes of the castle hall. As soon, however, as all vestiges of the meal had been removed, the voice of the Count of Ehrenstein was heard, saying aloud, “Let all men, but knights, leave the hall. This good lord and I have business of moment to transact.”

“And jesters, I suppose you mean, noble lords; for they are well fitted to take part in solemn business of high import. What is finer food for them than to see grave men doing foolish things?”

“No, my good friend,” answered the Count sternly; “your company is very pleasant, but just now your absence will be pleasanter than your presence.” The jester laughed, whispered what seemed a jest to Count Frederick, and left the hall with the rest. While they were troo-

ing out, the Count of Ehrenstein spoke something quickly to his friend, who answered immediately, “No, no, the other case first. See upon whose evidence the charge rests before you judge him.”

“I need no evidence but what I have,” replied the Count; “but be it as you will, Leiningen.”

Count Frederick nodded; and looking round the hall, in which six gentlemen, bearing knightly rank, were left, besides Mosbach and Sickendorf, and the two lords, he raised his voice, and addressed one of his followers, saying, “Tell them to bring Martin of Dillberg before us, and gather those men together whose names I gave you.”

The knights hastened to obey, the two noblemen seated themselves at the higher end of the hall, the others ranged themselves around, and all waited in gloomy silence for the events that were to follow.

## CHAPTER XIV.

WITH a pale countenance and feeble limbs, Martin of Dillberg was brought into the presence of the two lords. Imprisonment, even for the short period which he had endured it, had taken from him all the bold confidence which he usually displayed, and which had served not a little, on many occasions, to deliver him from difficult and dangerous circumstances, into which a perverse heart and a subtle and unscrupulous mind had led him. No sooner did he appear, than a dark and terrible change came over the face of Count Frederick of Leiningen. His frank, open, and cheerful countenance had become grave some minutes before; but now a heavy frown gathered

on his brow, and a stern, indignant quivering of the upper lip seemed to show that it was with difficulty he refrained from heaping reproaches on the youth's head, rather than treating him as a prisoner before his judge. The young man's courage, already low, sank still farther when he saw the expression of his lord's face, and he turned an eager and imploring look to the Count of Ehrenstein, but found no comfort there.

“Martin of Dillberg, stand forward,” said Count Frederick, in a loud tone, “and answer for yourself before the witnesses against you enter. “Did you, or did you not, linger behind at Saarbruck, on the pretence that your horse had fallen with you, and injured you severely?”

“And so he did, my noble lord,” said the youth, taking a step forward, with his heart somewhat lightened by the first question. “You yourself saw that he fell, and hurt me.”

“That he fell, I saw,” answered the Count; “that he hurt you, depended only upon your own testimony. But answer again, Whence went you from Saarbruck?”

“To Zweibrucken,” answered Martin of Dillberg.

“At what hour did you set out?” demanded his lord.

“Early in the morning, my lord, the day after you went,” replied the young man; “and I reached Zweibrucken towards evening.”

“A long journey for a hurt man,” said Count Frederick. “But let that pass. I must have been in Zweibrucken when you were there; why did you not join me?”

“I knew not of your being there, noble lord,” replied the youth. “I lodged at the first little inn I found; and I have heard since that you were at the abbey.”

“Good,” answered the Count. “Whence did you go from Zweibrucken?”

The young man paused and hesitated, but at length he answered, “To Anweiler, my lord.”

“In one day?” asked Count Frederick,—“a longer journey still.”

“I was stronger that day, sir,” answered Martin of Dillberg; “and bore it well enough.”

“Doubtless,” said Count Frederick, drily;

“ but why was it you went to Anweiler at all, leaving the straight road hither?”

“ Because I was alone, my lord,” answered the youth; “ and knew not the way over the hills. They told me, too, that it was dangerous, and I thought the high road less so.”

“ Then, when left you Anweiler?” inquired Count Frederick.

“ On the following morning early,” was the reply.

“ Then, had you made as much speed as before,” replied his lord, “ you must have reached Ehrenstein before me, for I passed nearly two days at Zweibrucken.”

“ My horse cast a shoe,” said Martin of Dillberg, with a varying countenance; but then a light seemed suddenly to come over it, and he added, “ and I lost my way amongst the hills, and could not find it for some time, so that I was obliged to return to Anweiler.”

“ Where you passed a second night,” said Count Frederick. “ An excellently well told tale, but it will not serve your purpose, youth.

Bring in the witnesses.—First, the good host from Anweiler.”

Martin of Dillberg’s countenance fell ; and a great, burly, grey-haired man was brought in, and placed by his side.

“Now, mine host,” said Count Frederick, “repeat what you told me about this good youth, the questions that he asked you, and the way that he took.”

“Why, my good lords and noble gentlemen,” replied the innkeeper, after looking a moment at Martin of Dillberg, as if to identify him, “there was no great harm in what he said, or in what I said, either. We were talking that night, when he first arrived, over a bottle of good Zeller wine, about the state of the country round, and I said, we should do very well, and be happy enough, and be well contented, for we had a number of good lords round who were kind to us, if it were not for that devil of a Baron of Eppenfeld, who robbed and pillaged wherever he thought fit, and plundered all the merchants that travelled our roads without a safe conduct from him ; and then he

said,—that is to say, the youth here,—that he should like to see this Baron of Eppenfeld much. I told him he had better not, for he might get himself skinned alive ; but he only laughed, and asked the way to the castle—that’s Eppenfeld, I mean.”

“ That was, that I might keep out of the way of the Baron,” exclaimed Martin of Dillberg.

“ May be,” said the host ; “ but the next morning, before I went away, I left my woman to take the reckoning, and ambled off upon my ass to see how the vines were looking on the hill ; and as I was going along the little path amongst the vineyards, just above the road, you know, where you look to Creuzberg, who should I see trotting along below me, at a quick pace, but this good youth here. I don’t mean to say he was doing any harm ; I know nothing about that ; but I know he turned off the road, up the valley towards Eppenfeld. We call it Hell’s Mouth, for few go in there that come back again ; and if they do, it’s in the form of devils.”

“It was there I lost my way,” cried Martin of Dillberg.

“As to that, I know nothing,” said the host; “but you came back that night, and slept at my house, and you were not near so chatty as the night before.”

“Enough, enough,” said Count Frederick; “we have traced him on the road to Eppenfeld; we shall soon find him at the castle gates, and hear what he did there.”

Martin of Dillberg’s two hands clasped together, straining tightly upon each other, but he said nothing; and his lord, whose eye was fixed upon him, at length, demanded, “Now, youth, will you confess your crime?”

“I have committed none,” said the young man, sullenly.

“Bring in the man we took in the watch-tower,” said Count Frederick; and looking to the host, he added, “you may go for the present.”

A man was instantly brought in, of a fierce and sullen countenance, who gazed round him as if in some alarm; but Count Frederick soon

calmed the sort of savage fear he seemed to feel, saying, "Do not be afraid, no harm is intended you. Now answer truly, did you ever see that youth before?"

"To be sure, I have," answered the man; "I opened the gates for him, some days ago, at Eppenfeld."

"But did not I come to ask the way?" exclaimed Martin of Dillberg. "I adjure you, tell the truth. It can do you no good to ruin me—did I not ask the way?"

"You asked the way to my lord's presence," answered the man gruffly; "that's all you asked; and I showed it to you, as I always did single travellers; for he knew best how to deal with them;" and the man ended with a laugh.

"It is malice," said Martin of Dillberg; "it is malice."

"We shall soon see where the malice lay," said Count Frederick. "My good lord of Ehrenstein, there were men of yours who were present with the youth, your squire, Ferdinand of Altenburg, who heard the message which the Baron of Eppenfeld sent me back. They were

freed from the dungeon into which they were thrust, and I pray you let them be called to bear witness of the Baron's words."

The face of the Count Ehrenstein seemed somewhat discomposed ; but a moment's thought reassured him. "Were it not better," he said, "to bring down the Baron himself, as he is in the castle ; he sent a rash message to me also, which he has since formally retracted in writing. Perhaps it may be the same in this case."

Martin of Dillberg looked up with hope ; but Count Frederick answered, "No, my good friend, the Baron is my prisoner, and may be supposed to act under my influence. Let Ferdinand of Altenburg be called, if you will, he will speak the truth, and though it seems he is in disfavour with yourself, yet that cannot affect this question."

"He is my enemy," exclaimed Martin of Dillberg. "He will say aught he can to injure me."

"We will see if what he says accords with the evidence of others," answered the Count

of Leiningen. “He has had no means of knowing what others say; I pray you have him brought, my lord. But, first, I would have those men examined who were with him, touching the reply the Baron sent to me.”

The Count of Ehrenstein had been meditating somewhat deeply; but he saw that if there were danger of suspicions being excited against him by anything that Ferdinand might say, it was a danger that must be encountered sooner or later, and that the recantation of the charge which had been made by the Baron of Eppenfeld was his best security. He would fain have avoided the risk, however, and a knowledge of Ferdinand’s character taught him to believe, that whatever peril he might stand in himself, he would confine his replies entirely to the questions addressed to him, which might not be the case with the common soldiers. “Let Ferdinand of Altenburg be brought hither, Mosbach,” he said. “His evidence will be sufficient for that link in the chain. But, my good lord, if we are to decide this cause, we must have better proof than what the

Baron of Eppenfeld said in a moment of rage. That is quite valueless; he accused me, he accused you, he brought charges against every one; but you have testimony at hand which can be rendered available. I found you in the castle hall, after the fall of Eppenfeld, putting questions to a man, named Fritz of Sambach, I believe, who, I have been told, acted as this great marauder's lieutenant. He brought the charge you are aiming to make good against one of your train, though he could not tell his name. He is here in a chamber hard by, let him be brought in, and see if he identifies the prisoner; and, lest any one should suspect that he is influenced by his captivity, give him his liberty before he speaks; there can be no great object in detaining him, and we cannot be too careful that every point be proved, in a case of this kind."

"So be it," answered Count Frederick. "Let him be brought in, if he is well enough."

"Oh, he can come," answered Sickendorf; "I saw him drink a stoup of wine, an hour or two ago, which would hold any three flasks in the

cellar. I will bring him in a minute; but let the youth be seated amongst the rest, that he may have fair play."

"True, true," answered Count Frederick; "thank you, good knight, for that honest thought.—Sit there, Martin of Dillberg. This time you shall have plain justice to the full in every way. See that the guilt on your countenance does not testify too plainly against you."

The young man seated himself as he was told, and in a few minutes Fritz of Sambach was supported into the room by two stout soldiers of the Count Ehrenstein.

"Well, lords, what is it you want?" said the plunderer, in his usual ready tone. "Here I am, for you to do what you like with me."

"First," said the lord of Ehrenstein, "we have sent to announce to you that you are free; there is no use of keeping the minor offenders when their chief is in our hands."

"Well, that's civil enough," answered Fritz; "but as you have taken all I had in the world, and scarified my skin pretty handsomely, I

trust that, before you send me away, you will cure my wound, fill my belly, and give me a broad piece or two in my purse."

"Nay, nay," said Count Frederick; "your wounds shall be cured, you shall have food enough, too; but as for broad pieces you must get them where you can; you will have none here. And now, being a free man, I have one more question to ask you. You said, before many witnesses, that you got the tidings which led you to plunder the Italian merchants, from one of my people. It was a serious charge, and should not have been advanced lightly."

"Lightly!" cried Fritz; "I said it quite seriously; and it is as true as that I stand here. He came and told the Baron all about their route, and said they had great store of gold with them. He drove his own bargain, too, and then he went and betrayed us, I suspect. But I can tell him, if ever I get well of these cursed wounds, I will cut his throat for him; though he does sit there amongst knights and nobles, as if he had no hand in the affair for which we have all suffered."

“Then do you see him present,” demanded Count Frederick. “If so, advance and touch him.”

The man walked somewhat feebly forward, and laid his hand heavily on Martin of Dillberg’s shoulder, saying, at the same time, “Here he sits. Ay, do not finger your dagger; I have strength enough left to strangle twenty such as you.”

“Enough,” said Count Frederick, “enough. Let him go free, have his wounds tended, and when they are better, let him pass the castle gates at his will. Now, Martin of Dillberg, convicted traitor, stand forth again. My good lord Count, and noble knights here present, you have heard the evidence,—is any more required? Is this young man guilty of base treason to his lord, of the blood that has been shed in this affair, and of taking an active part in the plundering of honest merchants, travelling hither upon the warrant of our safe conduct? Pronounce if he be guilty or not, and name the punishment which, according to our customs and laws, is awarded to such deeds.”

“He is Guilty,” said the Count of Ehren-

stein; and each voice around repeated the word "Guilty."

"Death is the punishment," said old Sickendorf; "and well does he deserve it. By the cord, if he be a boor; by the axe, if he be noble." Each knight present pronounced the same judgment; and while the awful sounds of his condemnation rang in his ear, Martin of Dillberg stood silent and pale in the midst, with his eyes bent down upon the ground; but when a momentary silence followed, he raised his face, and gazed wildly at the Count of Ehrenstein, exclaiming, "Oh! my lord, will you not save me to prove——".

The Count turned from him, merely replying, "Traitor!" and then, springing forward, the wretched youth cast himself at Count Frederick's feet, crying, "Oh, my lord, my lord, spare me for my father's sake!"

"Thrice have I spared you for your father's sake," said Count Frederick, sternly; "and I will spare you no more. I trusted that mercy might win you to better things, and that kindness and confidence might render you true and

honest, but I have discovered nought in you but malice, and falsehood, and treachery; and even for your father's memory it is well that you should die. You have heard your doom. Go hence, and prepare for death."

"Then I will do something worthy of it," cried the young man, starting up quickly, drawing his dagger from the sheath, and aiming a blow at Count Frederick's breast with the quickness of lightning. The Count, however, had time to turn it aside, receiving merely a slight wound in the arm; and the youth was immediately seized by two of the knights, and thrown back upon the pavement. His dagger was then wrenched from him, and he was dragged out of the hall, struggling fiercely with those who held him, just as Ferdinand of Altenburg was brought in from without.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE manner and appearance of Ferdinand of Altenburg afforded a striking and favourable contrast to those of Martin of Dillberg. There were traces of mental suffering, indeed, on his face, and there was some anxiety in his eye, as it ran slowly round the circle of those present; but there was nothing like fear. There was no trembling apprehension; neither any appearance of stubbornness; but with an upright head, a straightforward look, and a firm though serious aspect, he confronted those who he knew were to be his judges, and him who was about to be his accuser. The Count of Ehrenstein fixed his eyes sternly upon him; but the young man's countenance did not fall; and his lord remained for some moments in silence, as

if considering how he should proceed. At length, however, the Count addressed him directly, saying, “ Young man, do you confess your crime against your lord ? To you I need not explain your fault. It is a high and grievous one, as you are right well aware ; and as I know you fearless, and believe you to speak truth, I call upon you to answer, on your honour, whether you be Guilty or Not.”

“ My lord the Count,” replied Ferdinand, “ I know no cause why a man should be made to condemn himself ; and, on the other hand, if I say that I am not guilty, my saying so will not be considered by you or any one as proof that I am innocent. That you have some charge against me, I know, from your having imprisoned me for some hours ; but what that charge is, you have not told me ; and it is but fair that I should hear it. Nay, more ; it is but just that you yourself should prove my guilt, if I be guilty ; that you should bring forward witnesses of any act in which I have offended ; that you should confront them with me, me with them ; ay, and let me bring forward

witnesses, too, to prove my innocence after I am told my crime. I do not know much of the law and custom of the land; but I do know that this is justice."

"It is so," said Count Frederick, with a look of grave approbation.

But the Count of Ehrenstein replied at once, "I have power of executing justice in my own court, according to its customs; and I have but called this noble lord and these good knights to aid me with their counsel, that the law of the case may be sure. There are cases in which the relations of social life are invaded, and of which, to publish the whole facts to the wide world, would be doubling the injury inflicted. I hold high justice in my own lands; and in my own court will I judge you. But will merely put one simple question to these knights here present; it is this: If the sworn retainer of a baron of the land presumes, in secret and without lawful consent, to marry the daughter of his lord, what is the punishment our customary law awards for that offence?"

“ My lord the Count,” replied Ferdinand, “ this, then, is the charge against me ; founded, I suppose, on the testimony of the base youth who has just been taken hence ; but as it seems you do not intend to try me now, as to whether I have been guilty of that offence or not, I will keep what I have to say on that score till another time, when I can call witnesses to prove what has been my conduct, and why. As to your question, however, I must say two words before it is answered. First, I am not your vassal, nor your serf, nor what is called your customary man. By birth, I am your peer, as I will prove when need be, and as you well know. Then, as to the only oath I ever took, it was to serve and defend you in your life and goods, at the peril of my head, and I have done so. There is no other oath between us.”

“ That statement makes a great difference, my good lord,” said Count Frederick ; “ and you must amend your question, I think, unless you can claim this young gentleman *as your vassal*, in which case you can only confiscate

his fief; or *as your customary man* or serf, when his head is forfeit."

"I claim him as my customary man by oath, and by bread and wine," said the Count of Ehrenstein, "as the laws of the good king Louis stated; and by the same law it is provided that I shall execute justice upon him in my court, if I have right of high justice in my own lands. The question is, therefore, simply as I stated it,—What is the punishment our customs award to a sworn retainer who marries his lord's daughter without his consent?"

"Undoubtedly, death," replied Count Frederick; "but ——"

"Take him away," exclaimed the Count of Ehrenstein, waving his hand to the two soldiers who stood by Ferdinand of Altenburg; and the young man was immediately removed from the hall.

"You must hear me, my good friend," said Count Frederick firmly; "by the words I have uttered, I mean not in any degree to give sentence in this case, or to pronounce upon it in any shape, and I am sure in thus saying all

here will go with me. If the oath he took be such as he has stated, he is not your customary man, and you cannot touch his life. A thousand things may affect the question, of which we have no proof, even supposing that he has really done those things with which you seem to charge him. What has been said, therefore, is not by any means a sentence, but merely an answer to a question."

"That question answered," said the Count of Ehrenstein, with a bitter smile, "I will decide all the rest."

"Well," cried old Sickendorf, "I say with Count Frederick. I give no judgment in the matter. We all know—at least, we've all been told—that Ferdinand of Altenburg is of noble birth, and is even now looking up for knighthood. Doubtless, my lord might have married his daughter better; for the youth, I fancy, is as poor as any of us, but that does not make his offence so heinous. As to the law, I know little or nothing; but this I will say, that I do not think he has done anything worthy of death."

The Count of Ehrenstein merely nodded his head in grave but meaning silence; and then, turning to Count Frederick, without answering any of the observations which had been made, he led the conversation to other subjects, asking in a light way, whether he would like to visit his prisoner, the Baron of Eppenfield, that night, or would wait till the following morning.

With a somewhat mortified air, his friend replied, that they had had sufficient of painful tasks for one evening, and turned away to speak to some of his own retainers, while the Count of Ehrenstein whispered a few words to old Karl von Mosbach.

The expression of the old ritter's face, however, was somewhat doubtful and hesitating. He had no great love for Ferdinand of Altenburg, nor indeed for any other young man; for he was one of those who, after having enjoyed selfishly and grossly the pleasures of youth, look back upon them when they have passed away, with that sort of covetous regret, which engenders jealousy of those who have succeeded

to joys they can no longer taste, regarding them much as the rich miser regards his heir. He was a prudent and a cautious man, however; and while Sickendorf was disinclined to countenance his lord's vengeance, from better feelings and a more generous heart, Mosbach, without pity or remorse, was restrained by doubts and apprehensions. Whatever it was that the Count said to him, he replied, shrugging his shoulders, "Well, my good lord, you know best; but they are all against it, that's clear, and Count Frederick's a powerful prince, likely to have weight in the Imperial Court."

The Count smiled with his usual bitter expression, and then replied, in the same low tone to which their conversation had been restrained, saying, "I will give way to his vengeance on his follower, Mosbach; and in an hour after, he must give way to mine, for rightly viewed—though he sees it not—his case is no better than my own. But I tell you, Mosbach," he continued, grasping his arm, and shutting his teeth close, "this youth shall

not escape me, if I live and rule in Ehrenstein for two days longer."

While this conversation had been taking place between those who were left in the hall, Ferdinand of Altenburg had been taken back to the place of his confinement, by the two soldiers into whose charge he had been given. They led him on civilly and kindly enough, for he was a universal favourite in the castle ; and one of the men could not refrain from expressing his sorrow at the situation in which he was placed. "Ah! Herr Ferdinand," he said, "this is a bad business! Would to Heaven you had not been so rash! Love between a young gentleman and lady is all well enough—it's a thing that can't be helped, and is quite natural ; but to marry her secretly was as mad a trick as ever I heard."

"It is not proved, my good friend, that I did," replied Ferdinand. "I have had no trial yet."

"Ay, ay, but our lord's trials are short enough, and soon over," answered the soldier. "You remember when he caught William

Schaeffer in sparing the goods of the fat boor by Simburg, because he was in love with his little daughter—was not he detected, tried, and hanged in less than an hour and a quarter? It's a bad business, I say. However, what we can do to comfort you we will, and will bring you some wine and meat, for you must want it, unless your friends the ghosts have fed you."

"I fear," answered Ferdinand, "they do not deal in such substantial things, my friend. So I shall be glad of any provision you can bring me. But do not you run any risks on my account. It is bad enough to be in such an evil plight one's self, without bringing one's friends into trouble.—But who is that standing at the door of the cell?"

One of the men, who held a lamp, raised it to throw the light farther, and at the same moment Count Frederick's jester came forward, exclaiming in his usual tone, "Ah! friend rat, have you come back so soon? I have been looking at your cage; it is wonderful what a number of rat-traps there are in this world, and what sweet baits the devil uses to lure men in

—gold, and arms, and silk, and velvet, and pretty women. Good faith ! your bait was one that might well tempt a young rat like you to nibble. I've seen a kingly crown before now in that same devil's trap, and a goodly bait it proved, for it caught three before it was carried off by a more cunning royal rat than the rest ; but after all, woman, woman is the most killing bait, and the most common ; for which reason our great enemy has strewed them about all over the earth, as men scatter poison to destroy vermin. Poor youth, poor youth !—to be trapped so early. I am sorry for your lack of wit."

" Faith ! Herr von Narren," answered Ferdinand, " I have neither wit, will, nor spirit, at present to jest with you. I have to think of death, I fancy, and to prepare for it as best I may."

" Well, Heaven speed you !" said the jester ; " and yet that 's a sorry wish, too. I should rather say, Heaven delay you ! as you are not very willing for the journey, I should think ;" and as the young man passed him to enter the

cell, he added in a low voice, “I will go and tell your friends the ghosts of your sad case; perhaps they may give you spiritual help.”

These words, however, from the lips that spoke them, gave no comfort to Ferdinand of Altenburg, and entering his cell, he asked one of the soldiers to bring him any food that was to be allowed him as speedily as possible, and if he could obtain permission to let him have a light.

“You shall have both, Herr Ferdinand, without permission,” answered the man. “I shall ask no questions about it; and as I have no orders, either one way or the other, they can but blame me for a mistake.”

For about ten minutes, Ferdinand remained in darkness, after the soldiers left him; but at length his friend reappeared, bringing him a flask of wine, some meat, bread, and a lamp. “I must be quick,” he said, as he set them down; “for they’ve all parted in the hall in bad humour, and old Mosbach is walking about like a she-wolf on a winter’s night,”

Before he touched the provisions, and as

soon as the door was closed, Ferdinand took the lamp, and examined the chamber carefully, to see whence the voice he had heard could have proceeded. It was a large, low-roofed room, directly underneath the lower hall, and supported by two short, strong, stone pillars ; but though he walked round every side, looking keenly for any break or flaw in the walls, he could find no doorway but that by which he had entered, no aperture but the loophole which gave it light by day. The voice had seemed, however, to come from the other side of the chamber, and there all was blank stone. Could he have deceived himself? he inquired. Could the strange sights and scenes he had lately witnessed have so far excited his imagination, that a wild fancy could assume all the signs of reality? "No, no," he thought, "that cannot be ;" and seating himself on the bench, which served for table also, he drank a cupful of the wine, and ate a small portion of the food. As he did so, the same voice spoke again, saying, " Eat and drink heartily : you will need it."

“Who are you, and what are you?” exclaimed Ferdinand, starting up, and gazing forward towards the corner from which the sounds seemed to come. But at that moment some one tried the door, as if to ascertain that it was fastened securely; and then he could hear voices speaking without, in which he thought he recognised the tones of old Karl von Mosbach and the Count of Ehrenstein.

## CHAPTER XVI.

IN about a quarter of an hour after Ferdinand of Altenburg had been removed from the hall, Count Frederick of Leiningen retired to his own chamber, and remained there in consultation with several of his retainers, for some time. The Count of Ehrenstein did not continue long in the hall after he was gone. None of the vassals or soldiery ventured to return to the chamber they had been told to quit some time before, and only Karl von Mosbach and old Sickendorf remained with their lord. Towards the latter, however, the Count showed all those signs of angry impatience which he was accustomed to display when any one ventured to cross him in his purposes: not, indeed, by words, for he

spoke not to him ; but by sidelong glances from under the heavy brow, and every now and then a curled and quivering lip, when his eye fell upon him. At length, after having walked once or twice up and down the hall, he said, “ Come with me, Mosbach,” and led the way towards the place of Ferdinand’s confinement. He there shook the door, to see that it was secure, and then, turning to his companion, he said, “ Ere noon to-morrow, Mosbach, he must die.”

“ It will be better, then, my good lord,” replied Mosbach, “ to do it quietly where he is, rather than to make a public execution of it.”

“ Perhaps it may,” answered the Count ; “ and I shall look to you to have it done.”

“ I must have your order, my noble lord,” said Mosbach ; “ your order under your own hand. Then it shall be done speedily, and no one need know but myself and those who do it, that he is not still living.”

“ Come to me in an hour,” said the Count, “ and we will consider how this order is to be given—Whether it were better to call a court of all the vassals, and judge him there, or by

my right, as a high justicer—they would condemn him, surely.—Well, we will see;—yet there were times of old when good friends would do their lord a service, and rid him of an offender without such formalities, well knowing that he has the right, and secure not only of his protection, but of his favour and rewards.—Ay, those old times are passing away, I fear.—Well, come to me in an hour;” and wending his way up the staircase, and through the corridor, he proceeded past the apartment of Count Frederick of Leiningen to the small tower in which the Baron of Eppenfeld was confined. Without pausing to think, for his mind was already made up, and his plans arranged, he unlocked the door and went in.

“Thousand Schweren!” exclaimed the Baron; “you are keeping me here a long while, Herr Count. I hope you are not going to play me false. Why, it must be past midnight, and I have had no supper.”

“Past midnight!” answered the Count, with a smile; “no, Baron, no; it is not yet eleven,

and all the people of the castle are up and stirring. They must sleep sound first, before you can escape ; but it is of that I came to speak. Count Frederick is fierce against you, on account of some message you sent him ; and he vows he will not rest satisfied till he has you before the Imperial Chamber."

"Why, the dog !" exclaimed the Baron, laughing, "the message I sent was all true. I only told him one of his people had put me like a hound on the track of these merchants ; and he did, too—a brown-faced, smooth spoken youth, who told me his name was Martin of Dillberg—but that might be a lie. However, if you will keep your word, old Leiningen may fret about the Imperial Chamber, if he will. I shall be far enough before he can catch me—the Imperial Chamber, good luck ! that would never do. But how is my flight to be effected ? Have you arranged that ?"

"It must be without my knowledge or connivance," answered the Count, drily.

The Baron gazed at him for a moment with renewed doubts ; but then he answered with a

laugh, “Oh, I understand—you are not to be seen in the matter, of course; but you can easily remove the men from the bottom of the stairs, and leave the door unlocked.”

“Nothing of the kind, I can assure you,” replied the Count. “Count Frederick’s men have relieved mine from the guard, and the staircase is impassable.”

The Baron swore a huge and heavy German oath, too long and ponderous for any English page, and then, with a bewildered look, asked how he was to get away.

There is a bitter pleasure in giving pain, at least in some men; and perhaps the Count would have prolonged his amusement, had he not been somewhat in haste. “There lies your only chance, Baron,” he said, pointing to the window. “You are not too broad in the shoulders to get out.”

“Why, you would have me break my neck!” exclaimed the captive; “it is full twenty feet down, and I fall heavy.”

“Not if you have a rope to hold by, I

suppose," was his companion's reply. "Now, mark me, my good friend, for I have not much time to spare:—an hour hence, if the castle be then quite quiet, you will find a strong rope let down from the window above,—it has borne one man's weight to-day, and may well bear yours. You have nought to do but fix it tightly to the bar, and then let yourself down. You will find no one on the battlement below; then take the traverse that leads direct to the outer wall, where, if you turn someway to the right, you will find steps that bring you to a little postern; the way thence is level, but narrow, till you reach the angle of the castle chapel. Avoid giddiness, or too much wine, for they are the only enemies you are likely to meet by the way. When you reach the chapel, take the first path down the hill, and there you will find a strong horse tied to a tree, with saddle and bridle. He is a gift, so you may freely take him. There is another gift, which use discreetly till you see better times," and as he spoke he laid down a purse upon the table, which seemed well loaded.

The Baron, with his usual greedy haste, clutched it almost ere it had quitted the Count's grasp, tossed it lightly up, and then caught it in his hand, "Ay, that chinks," he cried; "and as for the rest, I shall be ready at the hour. No fear of my brain turning giddy. I have been accustomed to walk on slippery places. Nevertheless, I should like some supper, for that is a very needful preparation to a long ride. Let me have some better wine, too, than that last; it was as thin and as sour as the juice of an unripe pippin. I don't believe the generous grape had any share in its composition."

"Well, you shall have supper, and good wine," answered the Count; "but be moderate in your meal, and think of the future, my good friend. And so this youth, Martin of Dillberg, came to you, and betrayed the good Italian merchants?"

"Ay, that he did," answered the Baron; "I should never have known aught about it, but for him. Let us not talk, however; time wears, and I am hungry. You shall find me

grateful, Count, in the way that may best serve you."

"I reckon on it," said the Count of Ehrenstein; "and so good-night, my friend."

Thus saying, he turned and left him, and gave orders at the foot of the stairs that a frugal supper, and one bottle of good wine should be taken to the captive.

As the Count was walking onward towards his own apartments, he was met by the chaplain of Count Frederick of Leiningen, who said, "They are seeking for you, my noble lord. Count Frederick wishes to see you before he retires to rest."

"I will go to him immediately," replied the Count; and with a slow and thoughtful step he sought Count Frederick's room. He found him surrounded by several of those who had been his companions in his expedition in aid of the Knights of St. John, and as soon as the Count of Ehrenstein appeared, his guest rose and advanced to meet him, saying, "Ehrenstein, my noble friend, I wish to make it as clear as possible, that we here present

think no just cause has been shown for putting to death your young follower, Ferdinand of Altenburg ; and without at all meddling with your right to judge your own people in your own court, which I respect as much as I would my own, I do beseech you not to proceed against him in any way without a fair and open trial ; for I do think you may find cause to alter your views regarding him, and to pardon his offence.”

“Would I could say the same,” replied the Count, “in regard to your follower, Martin of Dillberg ; but sorry I am to say that the charge against him is fully confirmed by our prisoner of Eppenfeld.”

“He dies at dawn to-morrow,” answered Count Frederick ; “that is determined. But this case is very different, as you must see. That youth has been thrice pardoned for very grievous offences, and it is now clearly proved, to the satisfaction of every one, that he is a base, deceitful traitor.”

“The cases are very different,” answered the Count, in a thoughtful and placable tone.

“ Well, I will consider of what you say. I am not a harsh man, Heaven knows.”

“ Then, have I your word,” asked Count Frederick, “ that for this night, at least, he is quite safe ?”

“ Safety depends upon Heaven’s will,” answered the Count, with a smile; “ but as for my neither saying nor doing aught that can injure him, he shall be safe, since you ask it; but, nevertheless, I beg you to remember, that this shall not prevent me from proceeding against him as I may think fit to-morrow, after I have considered, and spoken with you farther.”

“ That is all I could desire,” answered Count Frederick. “ Very many thanks, my friend, and peace be with you for the night.”

No sooner had the Count retired, than Count Frederick turned towards the jester and the priest, who stood near, saying, “ All is safe, then; and we may make our minds easy for this night.”

“ As safe as a chain of words can make it, uncle,” answered the jester; “ but I never yet

did find that the padlock of a promise was not easily picked, even by the weakest straw of an excuse. Go to, uncle; you do not know the unreclaimed hawk you are dealing with. Dungeons are very safe places for transacting secret business, and I should not be very much disposed to trust a callow doveling to the paternal care of a vulture."

"What can be done, then?" asked Count Frederick, "I fear for the fate of both these poor things; and I have promised the lady, too, to befriend her, in case of need."

"As for the girl," replied the jester, "you have an easy task; send down to good Father George of Altenburg, and tell him what has happened; let him know that she is in danger and in durance, and as he has got her into the scrape, let him get her out. As for the youth, I'll tell you what can be done;" and bending down his head, he whispered a word or two in Count Frederick's ear.

"Do as you like, do as you like," exclaimed the Prince; after listening with an eager eye and a knitted brow. "I must have

no share in that, my good friend ; for I feel myself somewhat bound by the words we have lately spoken. I will do as you suggest, regarding the lady ; and, moreover, will watch well. You must act in the other case, as seems best, without my knowledge."

"So be it," answered the jester, laughing and quitting the room ; and Count Frederick immediately turned to one of the eldest of his knights, saying, "Speed away down to the priest's, Gierheim ; tell him all the story ; and say, not a moment is to be lost. Take care to pass the gates quietly, however, and bid the warder-watch to let you in without noise. Here is my signet, as a warrant to him, and you may add a gold crown besides."

The knight took the ring, and hurried away without reply ; and the chaplain then addressed his lord, inquiring "What is to be done with this Baron of Eppenfeld, my noble lord ?" He little thought that I was aught but the chaplain of the Count of Ehrenstein, or he would not have told me all that had passed between them ; and if, from any farther

conversation, he finds out that he was mistaken, they may change their plans and foil you still."

"All that is provided for already," answered Count Frederick; "he will find his undertaking not so easy as he expects. We must force him to recognise these papers, however; though I should judge that your word would be sufficient."

Some further conversation followed on the same subject; but we must now turn to pursue the course of the nobleman who had quitted them a short time before.

As the Count of Ehrenstein turned away, after bidding his friend adieu, he murmured to himself, "Now, may good luck send that old Karl von Mosbach takes the hint I gave him; but whether he do or not, it shall make no difference. If Frederick of Leiningen holds his resolution, and puts his shrewd follower to death, the same axe shall serve for Ferdinand of Altenburg."

When he reached his chamber, however, he found old Karl von Mosbach waiting for

the promised order, and dismissing him with disappointed petulance, the Count paused, and thought for several minutes, and then visited his daughter's chamber, as we have seen. The interview moved him more than he suffered to appear, though it did not shake his resolution ; and when he returned to his own chamber, he dismissed the seryants who were waiting, and sat down by the table to think. “ What is it,” he said to himself, “ that makes me feel thus regarding this youth ? What is it that has always made me feel so strangely ? Loving and hating him at the same time, trusting and doubting him, relying upon him yet fearing him. It seems as if nature warned me to beware lest he should work me some great evil. He has done so, and he shall die ; then he can do no more ; but yet it is marvellous what a reluctance I have to shed his blood—and yet I seem to thirst for it. Am I growing weak and womanly, that my just purposes should thus shake me ? It shall be so no more. He dies, and then there is an end of doubts. I will hie me to bed, and not think of it.”

Undressing himself in haste, he extinguished the light, and cast himself upon his bed; but his head had scarcely pressed the pillow, when a voice repeated three times, “William of Ehrenstein!”

“What is it? Who calls?” cried the Count, starting up.

“One of the dead,” answered the voice. “Know you not the tongue?”

“I do,” replied the Count. “It is amongst the sounds of my boyhood. Why call you me?”

“I summon you to judgment,” answered the voice. “As you judge, so shall you be judged. In the great hall of the castle, before my chair of state, under the banners of our fathers, in the presence of knights and holy men who shed their blood for the deliverance of Christ’s sepulchre, I call you to your judgment. See that you be there, or sentence shall pass against you, which there is no power on the earth, or under the earth, to revoke. Make your peace with Heaven; for you have had your time, and it is passing away.”

The large drops of perspiration rolled from the forehead of the Count, and grasping the side of the bed firmly with his hand, as if to give him strength, he asked, “Who shall intercede for me?”

“In heaven, we have all an Intercessor,” answered the voice; “on earth, intercession is vain. Appear at the judgment-seat as you are called, receive your doom, send for the priest, and prepare.”

“Stay, stay, and hear me,” cried the Count; but the voice made no answer, and though he spoke again more than once, all remained silent.

Tossing to and fro, the Count of Ehrenstein remained sleepless and agitated throughout the night; at one time he thought he would rise and obey the awful summons he had received, either alone or accompanied by all whom he could gather together, but then again his heart failed him, and the hour passed by without his regaining sufficient courage to dare the result. At length, much to his relief, the glimmering light of dawn began to

shine through the window; and, rising, he roused his attendants, and gazed moodily from the casement for several minutes.

“ Let two men go down to the chapel in the wood,” he said, “ and bring up the priest, Father George, instantly. He may be alarmed, so give him every assurance of safety; but bring him by force, if he do not come willingly. These monks,” he continued, speaking to himself, as the men went to obey his mandate, “ how they encroach upon all their neighbours! Here, not content with lording it over every one around, they must needs plant this chapel within the very lands of Ehrenstein, like an outpost thrown forward by an invading army into an enemy’s territory. What fools our ancestors must have been to suffer such things! It is prescription makes them strong—ay, and our own weak hearts.—Judgment! Could it be a dream? How often slumber will cheat us with visions so like reality, that even when they are past, we know not whether they be true or false—and yet I have not slept since.”

“My lord, one of the pages of Count Frederick has brought this note,” said a servant entering. The Count took it, cut the silk, and read; then calling the boy in, he said, “Be it where Count Frederick pleases; bid him use this castle as if it were his own. Why, boy, how white thy cheek looks. Remember, none need fear but those who betray their lord. So go and give my message to your master.—Ferdinand of Altenburg,” he continued, murmuring to himself, “your hour is coming!”

## CHAPTER XVII.

HAD the Count of Ehrenstein and old Karl von Mosbach spoken loud and distinctly when they visited the door of Ferdinand's prison, the captive must have heard the pleasant arrangements making for his transmission to another world; for although the door was stout and thick, so as to be itself impervious to any sound, yet the pavement had sunk away from it, or it had shrunk from the pavement, leaving a vacancy of at least two fingers-breadths. But the nature of their conversation was such as to subdue the voice, even though they thought that no one could overhear them, and all that caught Ferdinand's ear was the indistinct murmur of tones which were well known

to him. They soon ceased, however, and he heard the sound of slowly retreating steps. After a pause, to insure that they were gone, he raised his voice, and inquired, “Is any friend near?” No reply was made, and though he repeated the question, all remained silent. “Well,” he said to himself, “if any one comes to my deliverance, he will doubtless come at the right time; so I will even follow the counsel given, and eat and drink heartily.”

The food, the wine and the hopes that had been given him, revived the spirits of the young captive, and his meditations, instead of being continued upon death, and the loss of all he loved and valued, were carried vaguely over a thousand circumstances connected with his situation; the strange events that so frequently interrupted the ordinary course of proceedings in the castle, the special care which seemed so mysteriously taken of himself, and the question of how and when it was all to end. Adelaide, too,—he thought of Adelaide often and deeply; and thrilling, painful apprehensions for her frequently crossed his mind; for though he

felt sure that her father's anger would not fall so heavily upon her as upon him, yet he well knew that she would not be suffered to escape without some severity, and he thought that she was less able to bear it than he was. How would she act? he asked himself—what would she say when questioned? But these ideas raised up others, and they again mingled themselves with fresh associations; Adelaide's conduct in the past puzzled him even more than the question of what might be her conduct in the present or the future. What was it, he asked himself, which had caused so great and sudden a change in her demeanour, which had rendered her—so timid and apprehensive in the first dawning of their love—in a moment willing, eager, anxious to unite her fate with his, although no objection seemed removed, no danger lessened. It seemed very strange; and, connected with the sights he had seen, and the words he had heard from beings whose nature and properties were all a matter of doubt and mystery, it led to still deeper thoughts and inquiries—why should spirits thus be suffered

to revisit the earth where their mortal career was terminated?—Or rather, was it not very natural, that if judgment did not immediately follow dissolution, and the souls of the dead were not instantly transferred to endless joy or endless sorrow, they should be allowed to haunt the scenes in which the sins of earth had been perpetrated by the wicked, or the virtues of the good had been exercised, and to witness, mingle with, and take part in the results of their own past deeds, as they affected living men?

Such thoughts whiled away some hours, and, in the mean time, the sounds in the castle ceased one by one, till all became still; but sleep had no power over Ferdinand's eyes, and he was still sitting rapt in meditation, with his back leaning against the stone wall, and his arms crossed upon his chest, when the same voice was heard again, making him instantly start up, “Ferdinand,” said the voice, “it is time to go.”

“But how can I go?” he demanded, “and where?”

“Hast thou not a key?” demanded the voice; “the master key of all these doors.”

“Nay,” answered Ferdinand; “I was obliged to give it to another to bear tidings of our fate to the priest.”

“Take up the lamp, then,” said the voice, “and approach the stone in the middle of the pavement.”

The young man did as he was bidden, and beheld a large slab of slate-coloured stone, with some old characters engraved upon it. They were,

Beneath this stone lieth the body of  
Wolfgang of Spires,  
Who built this Castle from the Foundation to the  
third story of the Keep,

In the space of three-and-twenty years,  
At the end of which he was called to a Mansion  
not built with hands.

He rests in peace.

Ferdinand gazed upon it, holding down the lamp, and reading the rude letters with some difficulty, mentally inquiring, as he did so,

“What has this to do with me?” But suddenly he thought some wind had made the flame of the lamp quiver, for the letters seemed to shake, and then the stone began to rise slowly in two-thirds of its length, the other third being depressed, as it moved upon a pivot. When at its full height, the wooden rounds of a ladder were perceived, and the voice said, “Descend.”

A doubt flashed through Ferdinand’s mind, as to whether this might not be a means of consigning him to a nameless and unrecorded death; but it instantly passed away, as all the events which had lately taken place crowded upon his memory; and, without showing any hesitation, he began the descent, carrying the lamp in his hand. As his foot touched the ground below, he gazed around, but all was vacant, and he found himself in a vault or monumental chapel, against the east side of which was placed a stone altar, with mouldering ornaments upon it, and to the north a marble tomb, surmounted by a recumbent figure in a burgomaster’s gown, with the face

turned to the altar, and the right hand holding a mason's rule. Opposite to the altar, on the west, was an old wooden door, partly open, and in a state of complete decay, and as the young gentleman turned towards it, the voice said, "Go forward." Still obeying implicitly, Ferdinand of Altenburg advanced, and pushed open the door. Before him was a long passage, and as he walked on he heard a sound of clang ing steps, as of men walking over a stone pavement, in arms. There was no door to the right or left, and nothing to be seen but cold walls of rudely finished masonry, except as he approached the end, where a flight of stone steps led upwards as if into the castle again. Ferdinand hesitated for a moment at the foot; but then, as he had been told to advance, and there was no other way of doing so, he proceeded till he had numbered thirty steps, and then found himself at the end of a narrow passage, leading to the right. On his left hand was a row of small fretted arches, filled up with stone; but on the other hand, where the same decoration appeared, though

the lower part was closed with masonry, the fanciful stonework in the point of each lancet arch was left clear, as if to give air to the sort of gallery in which he stood, and a faint light shone through the apertures from some chamber beyond. There was a sound, too, rose up, as if he was raised high above a chamber full of people, and approaching one of the arches, with natural curiosity, the young fugitive looked through. He then discovered that he was in a gallery at the end of the great old hall, but raised as high as the capitals of the columns, and below him a strange sight presented itself by the faint light which reigned in the hall. It was somewhat different from that which Adelaide beheld; for, although there was the same range of armed forms, stretching in line towards the great door at the other end, the chair of state was vacant. No motion was observed in the figures underneath: each stood in his arms like a statue, but yet there was a faint murmur, as if they spoke in low tones, and Ferdinand felt tempted almost to pause, and see what would follow. Ere he had done

more than take one hasty glance around, however, a voice, seemingly close to his ear, said, “Enough! go on;” and obeying, as he had done before, he advanced along the gallery to the end. There was no possibility of mistaking his way; for, with a sharp turn to the left, the passage led to the top of another flight of stone steps, down which he went, and suddenly found himself close to the top of the well-staircase, which he had descended more than once before, but on the other side. His way was now clear before him, and entering the serfs’ burial-vault, he hurried on, pausing not for a moment to look at the various ghastly objects it contained, till he reached the door leading to the crypt of the chapel. Going in amongst the wilderness of tombs and monuments within, he hastened forward towards the door at the other end, when a voice suddenly called to him,

“Ferdinand of Altenburg! gay bridegroom, whither away?” and a long, wild laugh rang through the pillared arches.

He started, and turned round. The sounds

appeared to come from an old tomb, on which stood a figure in chain mail. The right hand extended, seemed pointing at him with its truncheon; and Ferdinand fancied that he saw it move; but though he advanced straight towards it, the figure remained still and motionless, and on touching it he felt that it was marble. Raising the lamp above his head, till the flame almost touched the arch that sprang from the short pillar at his side, he gazed forward into the gloom, but nothing was apparent; and the instant after, the flame was suddenly blown out, and he felt himself grasped by a strong hand on either side. He strove to free himself by a quick, sharp struggle; but in vain. The two hands held him as if the fingers had been of iron, and a superstitious awe, mingling with apprehensions of a more tangible character, perhaps, deprived him of some of his strength and agility. Not a word was spoken while he strove in that vice-like grasp, and even when he desisted from his useless efforts, all remained dull and silent. There seemed something very terrible to his fancy in being thus

fixed, as it were by a power that he could not resist, to one spot, in darkness and in silence. “In the name of Heaven!” he exclaimed at length, “who are you?”

“We are friendly,” said a voice, “to you, and to your race, if we are foes to all other earthly beings. Come, and come quietly, for we will guide you to safety;” and at the same time the hands that held him forced him gently forward through parts of the vault he had never explored. They went slowly, and well they might, for everything before them was as dark as the pit of Acheron; but yet they seemed never to miss their way, and as they advanced, no halt, no stumble took place; no sound of foot-fall upon the damp earth of the vault was heard. It seemed long to Ferdinand, though perhaps the time that passed was really not more than five minutes, ere a sudden pause was made, and a door opened, for he could feel the free air blow upon his face, and a pale light began to shine under the arches where he stood. The next instant something like a large mantle was thrown over

him, and the hood drawn far down upon his face; and then, still held fast by either arm, he was hurried forth into the open air. He thought he crossed a court of the castle, and then went through another arched passage, but he could not see, for the night was dark, and the cowl over his eyes. But then, again, he felt that he was passing through the wood, for the ground became rough and uneven, the wind rattled through the leaves, and every now and then a thin branch struck him as he passed. Rapidly down the side of the hill they went upon their way; and now he could hear the footfall of several others besides his own; at length, however, they stopped again, and a wild neigh just before them gave notice that a horse was near at hand. The voice which had before spoken, now said aloud, "Watch, and be ready," and all remained silent for nearly half an hour.

Ferdinand would fain have questioned those who held him in their hands, but at the first word he uttered, the voice replied, in a low, stern tone, "Peace, if you would live!" In

two or three minutes after, a rapid step was heard; and then a voice, which seemed to Ferdinand very like the rough and inharmonious tongue of the Baron of Eppenfeld, exclaimed, “Ay, here’s the horse. He has kept his word;” but then, again, the voice which had spoken before, exclaimed, “Now!” There was a sound of rushing through the trees, a brief struggle, a few smothered curses, and then the words, “Bring him along!”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

FEEBLE and faint, with every nerve unstrung, with a swimming brain and a heavy heart, Adelaide of Ehrenstein unclosed her eyes after a long period of unconsciousness—how long she knew not; but it was evident that a considerable time must have passed since thought had left her, for she was now in a small room with an arched, stone roof, and a long pointed window. The sole furniture it contained was a stool, a table bearing a crucifix and a closed book, and the pallet on which she lay. “Where am I?” she asked herself, as her mind still wandered wildly over the past; and for an instant the impression was—for it cannot be called thought—that her father had executed his threat, and sent her to the con-

vent of the Black Nuns at Wurtzburg. The next moment, however, recollection returned more fully; her flight from the castle; her stay at the chapel; her journey through the wood, and then the horrible sight she had witnessed on the drawbridge, all flashed back upon memory, and with a sudden cry, as if of pain, she pressed her hand upon her eyes.

But Adelaide was not alone, as she thought; and the movement that she made showed those who watched her that she had revived. Instantly the well-known voice of Father George, low, but still rich and clear, said in her ear, "You are deluding yourself, my child. You are grieving without cause. He is safe and well, and far from the castle."

Adelaide started up and gazed at him with a look of doubt, mingled with reproach. Then shaking her head sadly, she burst into tears, saying, "I saw—I saw but too well! Why try to deceive me?"

"Nay daughter, I deceive you not," answered the monk, gravely; "'tis you deceive

yourself. Think you that in these dark times the axe can fall on none other but him you love?"

"It is true, indeed, lady," said the voice of Bertha. "It was not your husband. It was Martin of Dillberg whom they put to death. I spoke with the lay brother, myself, who brought the news."

Adelaide clasped her hands together, and looked up to heaven, with reviving hope in her eyes; but then, bending down her head again, she murmured to herself, "Now, God forgive me that I should so rejoice. There must have been some who loved him, too,—some whose heart must now be as cold as mine was."

"But few," answered the monk; "he perished well meriting his fate; and we may reasonably rejoice that the innocent have not suffered instead of the guilty. Take heart, then, my child; for this illness of yours has already been most unfortunate, and I must go to see how the evil can be remedied."

"But is it true, is it quite true, Father?"

said Adelaide, grasping his robe. “ He is safe? Oh, assure me of it! Nay, look not stern, good Father: you know not how the heart that loves as mine does doubts all things, fears all things, when there is danger to the beloved. I know what you would say; but when I am ready to suspect the evidence of my own senses, to think that my eyes and ears deceive me, you must have some compassion if I hardly can believe the voice of one whom I venerate.”

“ I make allowance, my child,” said the monk; “ but yet you do not reason well of these things. Were he not safe, mine would be another task—to console and to mourn with you. Be assured, then. But now I must leave you; for though he is safe, you are not; and for your safety I must provide.”

Thus saying, he left her; and Adelaide again and again questioned Bertha as to the fate of Ferdinand; but all she could learn amounted only to the fact, that a lay brother of the abbey had gone up to Ehrenstein at dawn, and, mingling with the people of the

castle, had witnessed the execution of Martin of Dillberg on the drawbridge. But of all sceptics, fear is the foremost; and no sooner was the lady fully convinced that the terrible scene she had witnessed had no reference to her young husband, than immediately new terrors arose. She fancied that the execution of Ferdinand might merely be delayed; that her father might still perpetrate the deed he had threatened; that at that very moment the axe might be raised to smite him; and she argued that her own flight would only render the Count more relentless, if her lover remained behind. As she thus lay and thought, the sound of horses' feet was heard as they passed at no great distance from the cell; and, raising her head, she listened, saying to herself, "Perhaps they bring tidings;" but the sounds continued some time, till at length they died away from the ear. It was evident that horses were going away from, not arriving at, the abbey. Then came the blast of a trumpet from no great distance, and then the murmur of voices, rising and falling, as of people

speaking vehemently, but far off. Shortly after, Father George returned, and with him the abbot, whom Adelaide had often seen before; a man far advanced in life, but of a stiff, unbending character.

“How goes it with you, now, daughter?” he said, seating himself on the stool by her side. “I have ordered some poor refreshments to be brought you, that you may pursue your journey with more strength; for I am sorry to say, this is no place of sure refuge. Your father’s men are seeking you already, and have been even now at the gates. Luckily, the brother who answered them knew not that you were here, and answered, boldly, ‘No;’—for which he shall have absolution; but if it be discovered that you are within our walls, we cannot refuse to give you up at the Count’s demand; for, although his haughty tone and frequent offences against the church would well warrant, in my poor judgment, a flat refusal, yet we poor monks meet with but little protection; and though we can,

thank God ! defend ourselves well, in case of need, yet the Imperial Court would leave us with our loss and damage, if we gave even a pretext for his aggression. I have heard his haughty words, however, and his threats to burn the abbey; but he may find its stones a stumbling-block at which he may fall down."

"I am ready to go, when you will, Father," answered Adelaide, turning an anxious look to Father George; "but, if they be searching for me, whither shall I fly?"

"You must wait a while, my child," replied the monk, to whom the words were really addressed, rather than to the abbot. "It is not the intention of our noble and reverend father, the lord abbot here, to send you forth without all care for your security."

"But, my good brother," said the abbot, "if these men return — — "

"We will send them back with such answer as they deserve," replied the monk, boldly; for although mild and gentle in manner, and by no

means so stern and rigid as the abbot himself, there was, in times of need and danger, that vigour and decision in the character of Father George which always rules weaker and less resolute spirits. At first the abbot, transferred from a distant priory, had struggled against his influence; and Father George had made no apparent effort to maintain it; but gradually, as years went by, and difficulties arose, the superior yielded more and more to one who seemed to yield most to him, and the rule of the mere monk over the present abbot had become more powerful than it had even been with Abbot Waldimer.

After a brief discussion, then, it was agreed that Adelaide should remain at the abbey till the hour of noon, when, with a shrewd calculation of the habits of his countrymen, Father George judged that lord and vassal, leader and follower, would all have occupations of a kind they would not willingly forego. He thought it possible, indeed, that ere that hour a new demand might be made at

their gate for the restoration of the lady to her father's power; but he was firm in his purposes, and doubted not so to use his authority in the abbey, as to commit the abbot to a decided refusal, from which, once given, he knew that the old man would not depart. Neither did he fear the result; for the sound of horses' feet, which Adelaide had heard, was but an indication of preparations for defence against any sudden attack; and vassals and retainers were already flocking in to support, with the strong hand, if need should be, a community who were generally kind and gentle masters, if not always safe and pleasant neighbours.

Father George also reckoned a good deal upon the presence of Count Frederick of Leiningen at Ehrenstein, to ward off any immediate collision between the castle and the abbey; for that prince, though vigorous and decided in character, was reverential towards the church, and adverse at all times to violence; and, in the mean time, he took care that from

one of those high towers of the building which I have alluded to, as being seen over the trees from the walls of Ehrenstein, a keen watch should be kept upon the gate of the castle, that the brethren might not be attacked unawares. Every five minutes, a messenger came down from the clear-sighted watcher, to convey to the abbot and Father George tidings of all that had been observed; and thus party after party of the followers of the Count of Ehrenstein were reported to have returned to the stronghold, and passed the drawbridge. Father George mused and calculated, till at length, turning suddenly to the abbot, as the clock struck ten, he said, "There cannot now be more than five of the men of Ehrenstein out. It were as well the lady departed at once; she can be guarded by those who brought her hither, and, passing unseen through the woods, will run no risk."

The abbot rubbed his hands slowly together, and then replied, "Good, good, brother George. Far from me to refuse the lady Adelaide refuge

and hospitality ; but when once she is beyond the walls, then let her proud father bluster if he dare."

"He will not be proud long, my noble lord," replied Father George ; "there are reverses preparing for him which he dreams not of ; and you may ere long see him humbled at your feet."

"Then will I receive him with fatherly tenderness," said the old man, with a look full of, what he thought, humility ; but in which, perhaps, a clearer eye might have discovered no small pride.

Father George, however, hastened at once to the cell in what was called the stranger's lodging, where Adelaide still remained with Bertha ; but on his entrance the maid held up her hand, and pointed to her mistress, who, worn out with watching, anxiety, and grief, had fallen into a brief slumber. The beautiful eyes were closed ; the long, dark, silken lashes rested on the fair cheek, now pale with weariness and sleep ; the head fell gracefully on the

shoulder, and the soft white hand dropped over the side of the pallet. It was a lovely sight to look upon ; and for a moment Father George paused and gazed, with strange emotions. His heart, bound down by icy chains to a solitary, unsocial life, yearned for a child like that. He asked himself—Is it well for man in any class, in any state, to live alone ?—to cut himself off from the dearest, the highest, the holiest associations of our nature ? Can he really feel and sympathize with human beings ?—Can he retain all the perceptions, all the qualities of the heart and mind with which God first endowed him,—to bless, and to be blessed ? Is he, in the full sense of the word, a man, if he do not exercise the rights, and fulfil the duties, of a man ? To extinguish hope and aspiration, to shut out love and affection, to separate ourselves from joy and sorrow, to put an icy bar between our bosoms and every warm feeling of our fellows—is this to live ?

But the monk indulged hardly a moment in

such thoughts. They flashed across his mind, and were then banished; but they made him feel that he was not a monk at heart; and gently and tenderly waking Adelaide from her slumber, he told her what was proposed for her; adding, in a low tone, “I have certain intelligence that he is safe and free.”

The lady rose joyfully, exclaiming, “And shall I see him, then, soon?”

“His steps and thine, my child, are bent in the same path,” answered Father George; “and doubtless he will reach the bourne before thee. But we must be speedy. Are you refreshed and ready?”

“Quite, quite,” answered Adelaide; “those tidings, dear Father, are better than wine or medicine either. Let us go. Come, Bertha, are you ready?”

“Ay, good lack!” answered the gay girl, who had now somewhat recovered her light spirits; “I am ready, since it must be so; but yet I am never very willing to exchange a comfortable roof and good provision for the

bare road and acorn woods; but let us go, lady. It is as well to do what is to be done with a good grace; and now Heaven send us forty miles from Ehrenstein ere night."

No long time was required to prepare; the nuns' gowns, which had been laid aside on account of the warmth of the day, were soon resumed; the hoods were drawn over the heads of the two girls, and, led by Father George, they went out into the great court of the abbey, where not only a number of monks were walking to and fro, some in meditation, some in busy talk, but a large party of armed men also were seated under an arcade that ran along one side, busily eating and drinking, and laughing with merriment somewhat dissonant to the grave solemnity of the scene.

Father George spoke to none; but walking rapidly across, opened a door under the cloister, and held it wide till Adelaide and Bertha had passed through. Then locking it behind him, he crossed a lesser court, and

thence led the two girls into what seemed a wing of the abbey. That there were high towers of Gothic stone-work rising above them, they clearly saw; but after passing along a narrow, vaulted passage, with rich tracery upon the roof and in the windows which flanked it on the left, their guide paused at a low door, covered with iron plates and large-headed nails, or bosses. By the side of the door stood a stone bench or coffer, and on it lay several tapers, not yet lighted, and a lamp already burning. Father George, before he proceeded farther, lighted three of the candles at the lamp, and giving one to each of his companions, he took a key from his girdle, and put it in the lock. He was, as we have described him, a hale, strong old man, but to move that door required the exertion of all his powers; and when at length it was thrown back, it exposed to view the entrance of a dark cavern or passage in the rock, which rose gradually from the back of the building.

“ Be not afraid,” said the monk to Adelaide;

“the horses and men are waiting for you in the wood at the end of this hollow. I feared that from the watch-tower of the castle they might see women’s garments flutter, if you went out by any of the gates, and that would instantly raise suspicion. By this road you may pass unseen for miles, till you are beyond all pursuit.”

“I fear not, I fear not, holy Father,” answered Adelaide; and while Bertha murmured to herself, “But I do, mightily,” they went on upon their way.

The cavern—which, though perhaps a part was nature’s handiwork, displayed evidently the traces of man’s labour also—extended for perhaps three or four hundred yards, and then terminated at another door, beyond which they found the dark woods sweeping round, and a spur of the mountain hiding the spot completely from the valley above which Ehrenstein was situated. Immediately beneath the door by which they issued forth was a slight descent, where broken fragments of rock, tumbled about in all directions, concealed from

all but very curious eyes the entrance of the passage to the abbey; and below that again, was a small green area, surrounded by tall trees, in which was collected a number of men and horses.

Adelaide and Bertha were soon mounted, the armed men sprang into the saddle, Father George bestowed his blessing upon the young heiress of Ehrenstein, and the word was given to depart, when Bertha, turning her head, exclaimed, "At least tell us whither we are going to, Father, as you go not with us."

"To Heiligenstein," answered the monk. "There you will find a place prepared for you;" and, approaching Adelaide's side, he added, "I forgot, in all the hurry of this day to tell you, my dear daughter, that till you hear more from me, for your own security and that of him you love, conceal carefully your name and rank; your young husband has been cautioned, but you must not forget to be careful."

"I will not," answered Adelaide; "and in-

deed it will be joyful to me to repose for a time even as a poor country maiden."

"A maiden!" said Father George with a smile; "nay, you must not forget you are a wife."

The colour rose warm in Adelaide's cheek; and, without reply, she rode on, musing.

END OF VOL. II.

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